

Advent III

Monday Zechariah 9:9

A Note of Joy

Perhaps you have noticed that the malls, the stores, and radio stations, and maybe even your home is filled with Christmas music, but your church is not. That is because originally Advent was a season of repentance, a season where we remember that we are sinners that need saving. The Christian Church celebrates Christmas beginning with Christmas Eve and lasting all the way through the six to eight weeks of Epiphany. The world celebrates Christmas all the way up till Christmas, and then you might have noticed how everything Δ Christmassy \cong gets swept away sometimes the very day after Christmas. Christians, historically, have muted their joy till Christmas, and then they have let it out for weeks following.

Except for this week. Did you notice that the candle lit in church yesterday was pink? Why in the world would we have a pink candle on the Third Sunday in Advent? Think what would happen if the white from the center Christ candle melted with the purple from the other candles. You would get a pinkish color. And that is the idea. During this week, our somber note of Advent is lightened by a note of joy.

We really want to keep joy in mind even after 3 weeks of Advent. We really can rejoice greatly because the final message about our sinfulness is forgiveness. Our Jesus is not coming to rub our faces in our sins as we might a puppy that has wet the floor. No, He is coming to lift up our faces and to wipe them clean of sin. He comes to bring us His righteousness. He comes to bring us His salvation. That is why even when it is not the Third Sunday we sing repeatedly in "Oh Come, Oh Come Emmanuel," "Rejoice! Rejoice!"

Prayer: Almighty God, through John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, You once proclaimed salvation; now grant that we may know this salvation and serve you in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Tuesday Mark 1: 1-4

Big Bad John

There is an old country western song titled "Big Bad John." It tells the story of a man named John who was big and ferocious, and everyone pretty much stayed away from him. Till one day the mine caved in and trapped many miners underground. Big Bad John saved those miners by holding up the roof of the mine with his big, strong back. You see, he only looked bad and mean.

That is how John the Baptist is in the Bible. He arrives on the scene dressed in a camel's hair clothing, which is very picky; he lives in the desert by himself, and he eats only grasshoppers and wild honey. Now when you hear Big Bad John the Baptist preach, "Repent," you may tremble in your shoes because you really are a sinner. You do not obey like you should. You disobey and backtalk when you shouldn't. But Big Bad John the Baptist is really doing something good and nice for you.

You might say John the Baptist is letting you know the mine is going to collapse someday. Because of sin, the roof is going to give way. Big Bad John the Baptist does not want to see you trapped in the mine, so he's telling you get out. But the only way out, the only Door is Jesus. John the Baptist is telling you that there is no salvation, no life, and no help in you. There is nothing you can do to stop the mine from caving in. No matter how good you try to be, no matter how hard you try to believe, the mine is going to cave in. John the Baptist is telling you to give up trying to save yourself. Run to Jesus. He is the Light shining into the mine shaft. There is safety and salvation in Him.

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Thursday John 17: 1-3

Knowing Salvation

We pray in the Collect for this Third week of Advent that we "may know this salvation." What does it mean to know salvation? Is it knowing the doctrine of the Trinity? Is it knowing what God knows? Is it knowing that we have not done any sins? Simply put knowing salvation is knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent.

But who feels they really know God? There are many things about God that are strange and even frightening. Even knowing Jesus Christ seems hard. I mean there is so much I do not know about Him or cannot even remember.

The real comfort is not in what we know but in what God knows. The real comfort is not in knowing Jesus but in Jesus knowing us. That is salvation when God knows us. God knew us before we were born and in Baptism He knows us as His dear children. Think about it. Did your mom or dad wait till you knew them as "mama" or "dada" before they claimed you? If that would have been the case, you would have been left at the hospital. What makes you your mom's child or your dad's child is the fact that she or he knows you. "Yes, that baby over there is mine," they say, and you are.

This is the salvation that we are to know. That we are saved because God knows us in Jesus. He has us engraved on the palms of His hand says the Psalm writer. He cannot get us off of His mind because of Jesus. Why He loves us so much, this year He's giving us His only Son for Christmas.

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Friday Romans 6: 1-5

Serving IN Holiness and Righteousness

Who can serve God in holiness and righteousness? Do not you fail every single day? You are told to do something and you say, ANo.≡ Or, worse you say "yes" with your mouth and Ano≡ in your heart. What miserable Christians we are. What is the use? Let us give up. Let us not even try anymore. Let us quit praying this Collect!

Once more we are looking at things from the wrong viewpoint. We have to look at this from inside our salvation, even more accurately we have to look at this from inside of our Baptism. Something powerful and radical happened in our Baptisms; more powerful and more radical than any of us dare believe. St. Paul says that we were buried with Christ in our Baptisms. Our sinful flesh was united to Christ and went to the cross with Him to die there. But that is not all. Jesus did not just bury our sinful flesh at the cross leaving us to start new holy and righteous lives on our own. No, He not only buried us with Himself; He rose with us too that just as He was risen from the dead by the glory of the Father even so we may too walk about in the new life He has.

When we pray to serve God "in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives," we are asking God to keep us in our Baptism. Keep us all wet with His grace, His mercy, His forgiveness that we may walk about in the holiness and righteousness that belong to Christ. We are asking that we may not be so foolish as to think we can serve God holy enough or right enough. No, we always need Christ, and in Him there is more holiness and righteousness than we have sins.

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Saturday 2 Timothy 4: 6-8

Close Does not Count

We pray in the Collect for the Third week of Advent "that We may know this salvation and serve you in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives." You have probably heard the expression "close does not count." If you are close to hitting a home run, it still is not one. If you are close to making an A, you still have a B. If you came close to finishing a race, you still did not. Close does not count before God either. That is what the Collect is talking about.

St. Paul knew that. Only the ones who finish the race and keep the faith get the crown of righteousness. At this point, you will have to feel pretty bad if you look at yourself. When I look at myself, I see a quitter, a person who is always close, but never a finisher.

It is a different story when I look at Jesus the Author and the Finisher of my faith. In the Explanation to the Second Article of the Creed, we speak about all that Jesus did to redeem us. He finished redeeming us. He did not start and leave it up to us to finish. And He succeeded in making us His own with the result that we can "live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness."

There is no close about it here. Jesus finished paying for our sins. Jesus made us His own. Jesus clothed us in Baptism with His holiness so that now we serve every day, day in and day out in that holiness. Jesus keeps doing this all our days. He does not stop doing it even when we fail for the millionth time. He never takes us out of our Baptism saying, "You are too dirty for Me to wash." Nope every day all the way to the Last Day, Jesus saves sinners. That is why we serve in "EVERLASTING righteousness, innocence and blessedness"; It is His not ours. Nothing humans do can last forever.

Prayer: Almighty God, through John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, You once proclaimed salvation; now grant that we may know this salvation and serve you in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen