

Date Preached

06-Dec-2020

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28-Nov-2020

Where Preached

SAK

Appointed Readings

Adv 2, Yr B

" ... but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. "



Have you ever thought about how new things in life ... the things that grow and freshen us ... also require us to adjust ... to re-make ourselves in some way ... if we are to fully live into them? We get the dream job we've always wanted, but also have to learn a new culture, get to know new people, fit new routines into our life. A new baby or perhaps a new pet enters our life, with all the attendant excitement and joy, but our sleep is disrupted and our responsibilities suddenly multiply. However positive a 'new' is, it nevertheless carries with it the tension and hard work of adjustment.

As we've been exploring over the past several weeks, Advent is a season of anticipating the final 'new': of leaning into the prospect of the full, final and forever realization—the revelation—of God's reign in and over this world ... of our coming to grasp that however much store we may set in the world we see and touch, it is but a small taste of the perfection God plans for humanity. But this practically begs the question: If Advent is the season that points to The Great New (all capitals), it must call upon us to make some adjustments ... to re-make some aspect of ourselves.

While I was pondering this, a prayer, written by a former professor of mine, showed up in my inbox as part of the AdventWord series. "Deliver us, O Lord, from the trials and tribulations we have *placed upon ourselves*. ... Deliver us from *ourselves* in words, actions and deeds." Perhaps some ... and some of the most essential ... work of preparation in Advent is to learn to see the old, tired (and, often, tiring) negatives of our lives ... the "trials and tribulations we have placed upon ourselves" ... with new eyes; with a new perspective that shifts us from struggling *toward* God and God's perfection ... to our struggling right along *with* God, and *in* God's perfection. Might not this be one of the 'missions' of Advent?

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That sounds great, but we should not kid ourselves. Dislodging perspectives taught of long, hard life experience is no easy task. Moreover, if God really desires us to hold in our hearts the Final Perfection of Everything that Advent bespeaks, then why has God so firmly located us in the ruthless and relentless reality of life in *this* world? For candidly speaking, God's design of the human condition has some pretty glaring design flaws. For one thing, the world God has given us constantly buffets us with trials and adversities that shake our faith and call into question God's awareness of us. The unmentioned prologue to today's Old Testament reading—happy and positive on its face—is Israel's decades-long captivity in Babylon: the destruction of beloved Jerusalem and the forcible deportation of an entire culture to a hostile and alien land. Where was God in this? How can such ethnic cleansing nourish any vision of eternal perfection?

Perhaps the most flawed of all our human 'design features' ... is the free will God gifts us. If grasping God's Perfection is the goal, would it not have been easier to have created us permanently tuned, as it were, to God's frequency? to have kept us in mythic Eden, where the need for us to make decisions or seek our own fulfillment would be obviated by God's all-provision? Instead, God gives

us minds that set priorities ... form opinions ... seize desires ... that corrupt and mislead us; that carry us only *away* from living in God's Wholeness. Thus, the Gospel of Mark begins with crowds of believers thronging around John the Baptist ... whom they've decided is the long-foretold Messiah and yearning for his baptism. No, no, John implores, you've got it all wrong. I'm not that guy! Why is it God's plan for us to hitch our wagons to false stars, over and over again? How can the one *true* promise of a world that is All-Christ ever take root if our human condition is to be distracted and misled by the thousand false ones we choose to believe?

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We cannot *change* the human condition God created, so perhaps the adjustment we need to make to Advent's 'new' is gaining a new perspective *on* that condition: to see all these seeming limitations, flaws and weaknesses in our design as part of God's *intent* for us ... given to us not to *hinder* our coming into the fullness of God's time, but actually to *hasten* it. Our Advent mission, then, it to re-imagine—to adjust our vision—of where God is, in all the negatives we perceive in life. It is to dial down the grasping, straining perspective that demands human-sized explanations of precisely how the realities of this world square with God's love for us ... and dial *up* the liberating, accepting perspective of the contentment in knowing that God designed us to be of-a-piece with God's love for us, full-stop. To know that the struggles and hurts and agonies of this life do not detract from our journey of faith but, in fact, *comprise* it. They are among the myriad pathways to God's Perfection.

Thus, In God's overarching love and care of us, there is no *permanent* adversity. What vexes us in this life carries us only further into the existence of God ... in the fervency of prayer, the struggle of despair, the paralysis of grief and even, sometimes, the blindness of rage. Our honesty with God helps perfect our knowledge of God and of the Perfection God promises.

But what of free will, that Achilles' heel of human existence whose corollary, sin, stains the entire human condition from Cain and Abel to what you chose to eat for dinner last night? Here, my friends, we come up against the totality of God's Perfection. In the saved world that Christ has already created, nothing ... absolutely nothing ... can eject us from the Garden or cut us off from God's love. God does not use any *one* momentous decision we make at any point in our lives ... *or* even the concatenation of every decision we have *ever* made ... as some giant 'Ethicometer' ... to judge our actions against a strict binary of good / bad ... 'gets it' / 'doesn't get it' ... heaven / hell. The infinite compass of God's Perfect Love means there is neither only one correct path nor any irredeemable sin.

At the same time, however, because Christ's Perfection is the norm to which we aspire as His disciples, choices we make that create pain or suffering or injustice ... that work *against* God's Perfection of creation ... yield us countless opportunities to be re-shaped by God's calling and re-aligned to God's will. Mistaking John the Baptist for the Messiah doesn't count against us, but John's correction pulls us more firmly into God's orbit. Clinging to our hatreds doesn't condemn us, but, with reflection, exposes the chasm between our actions and God's desires, so we can begin to close it. Selfishness, once named, is an invitation to convert our lives. When the pain of others confronts our feigned indifference to their plight, God pricks our souls and redirects them toward Jesus and His teachings.

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If Advent is the season when, from within our human condition, we sail closest to God's promised Perfection ... of all things in all time ... then perhaps what we should seek during these four weeks is the best set of binoculars we can find. So long as we attempt to see with our naked human eyes the glory of Christ's reign over all creation and His drowning of this world's ills in a final baptism of God's unconditional love, we will simply never make them out. Because our human condition dims Christ's glory and obscures God's full love, our eyes, alone, cannot see them. But Advent asks us to intentionally dwell in the prospect of God's Perfection and imagine this world wholly in God's time. Advent asks us to hold God's visions up to our eyes and look out ... through them ... into the Divine Reality ... to see the Final Newness of All Things ... that awaits, just over the horizon. And not despite our human condition ... but from within the very depths of it.



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