

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

RECOLLECTING OURSELVES FOR WORSHIP

Music (please use this time for quiet and reflection)

Gong [followed by silence]

Lighting the Third Advent Candle

\*\* Hymn – 4

Opening Prayer

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OUR HUMANNESS AND GOD'S GRACE

Call to Confession

Unison Prayer of Confession

Gracious God, even though I am not supposed to think this way, the truth is it is easy to get along without you. By and large the time I think of you is when I have in some way fallen short of the person I believe I am or think I should be, or am worried that I might fall short. You appear to me as the influence to reconsider something about myself as the way to reform myself. This withers me rather than sustains me and I find I easily tire of being related to you in this way. On a practical level this means that I am on my own when it comes to navigating my life. Theoretically I know I can ask you for help, but operationally and functionally what I know is that I will basically be counselled to try harder. When I struggle with myself I find I am faced with the options of continuing to strive or giving up, both of which are unhelpful. I need a different way of thinking about you, a way which does not have you in this scrutinizing and evaluative role, a way which allows me options apart from striving or quitting, a way of thinking of you that allows me to fall into you and wait for what is beyond me.

Personal Prayer of Confession in Silence

Assurance of Pardon

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LISTENING FOR THE WORD OF GOD

Story for the Children

Scripture – John 1:6-8, 19-28

Prompting

Silence and Reflection

RESPONDING TO THE WORD OF GOD

Hymn – 14

Announcements

Minute for Mission

Our Gifts and Offerings

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise Christ all creatures here below;

Praise Holy Spirit, Comforter;

One God, Triune, whom we adore. Amen.

The Prayers of the People and Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us in the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours

now and forever. Amen.

GOING OUT – to serve, to journey, to live the word

Hymn – 13

Charge and Benediction

\*\* People who have arrived late are seated.

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

TODAY	10:00	Worship
	11:00	Coffee and Fellowship
	11:30	Conversation
	12:00	Lunch Bunch
MONDAY	1:00	Centering Prayer, at church

Lectionary Readings for December 21, 2014

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26  
Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

FYI

Materials related to the 2014 Presbyterian Giving Catalog are on the table in the coffee room.

Also on that table is a sign-up sheet for treats for the Sundays in Advent and Christmas. The suggestion is to bring foods that have some meaning for us, for example “family favorites,” “traditional foods” and “favorite party foods.” The sign-up has two lines per Sunday so it is possible to “buddy up.”

Information about the financial support of our congregation may be found on the table as well.

There are two articles for your information: “The Context of Advent and Christmas,” and “The First Cycle of the Church Year.” Both are in the coffee room.

The Usher in the Narthex: Jim Plein.

The Usher in the Sanctuary: Jenny Goldgur.

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Church Office: 707-795-6620

Our web site is <[www.faithpresbyterianrp.org](http://www.faithpresbyterianrp.org)>

Elders: Joan Schmutz, Marolyn Bode, Jim Plein.

Deacons: Jenny Goldgur, Richard Egan, Mary Jane Beccaria.

Clerk of Session: Marolyn Bode.

[H] 585-8350

Pastor: Jim Robie

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**We are a community that gathers in an attitude of reverence directed toward God.**

**Reverence is a feeling of deep respect and devotion, of profound awe, of admiration and esteem and honor, of gratitude.**

**This feeling arises from the knowing that it is not possible to be separate from the welcoming and embracing presence of God, who is with us in anything and everything that life brings us, always accepting how we feel and what we think, always working to help us inhabit what is true for us, and to fashion the most fully human response possible for us in response to what our life contains.**

**If you are able to enter this worship experience in a reverential manner, you are encouraged to immerse yourself in the experience.**

**If you are not able to do so, you are encouraged to consider that being truthful to your experience is a way of showing reverence to God who invites you to explore the value of the way you feel in your life and about your life. You are also invited to ponder with us our conceptions about God, looking for more adequate ways to understand God and how God personally companions and supports us in all things.**

**Welcome!**

### THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT [John 1:6-8, 19-28]

God is constantly moving us toward the fullest human life each of us is capable of having. A full human life is an internal reality, related to but not the same as what characterizes our external life. A full human life is about congruence and integrity, about conscious participation in our own life. God moves us toward this through the creation of insights. Insights are the means through which God initiates and orchestrates changes in our inner life, changes which allow us to inhabit our life more completely and also to meet the vicissitudes and challenges that occur in our outer life. It may surprise us to realize that the stories we read at Christmas all have to do with God's initiating and/or orchestrating changes, small changes as well as significant changes. The stories about John the Baptist, Mary and Joseph, the baby Jesus, shepherds and kings, and the accounts that pivot around these characters, are all saying something about how God works changes in us which move us toward a full human life.

All change begins when insights come to us which inform us about what we are feeling, thinking and/or doing. These insights make us conscious that we are feeling, thinking and/or doing something, so that we are no longer thinking, feeling and/or doing "on automatic." Mostly these insights are informative and are in harmony with the image we have of ourselves so we are able to incorporate them and adjustments are made in the way we live. If we think of God as the creator of insight, we can understand how by sending us insights God orchestrates changes in our life all the time.

However, sometimes the insights we receive are not in harmony with our self-image; they distress us and are difficult to incorporate. When we become aware that this is the case we enter what the Season of Advent is relating, which is how we are readied for change to occur when we are resistant to it. When an insight distresses us and we cannot work with it we find we are impelled to respond to what is distressing us. Using the language of mythology, "John the Baptist" enters our life. John the Baptist is the name in mythology for what we would describe as an "urging" or "urgency" to respond to the insight that has distressed

us. We feel drawn to immerse ourselves in the effort to find relief by thinking about how to approach our distressing insight differently. The "influence" of John is toward having us use our minds to understand what troubles us, toward using our intelligence to "unpack" the insight that has distressed us, so we can see it in a way that allows us to use the insight to make changes in how we feel, think and/or act. The influence of John can be seen in the efforts we make to "analyze" what troubles us as a way to come to a better understanding of it and be freed of being captured in our distress. There are many times in life when this effort to think and feel our way into what is troubling us is sufficient to produce changes in the way we live and to reduce or eliminate the distress we feel.

However, sometimes the distress we feel is too great to allow the effort to analyze and understand to proceed. We find we are drawn into activities which distract us from our distress. All kinds of things can function as distractions; even the effort to analyze can be used in this way. By and large these are not things we choose as much as things into which we are pressed or pushed. Once the insight dawns that we are caught in this way, the urgency to respond [John the Baptist] comes again, the urging to use our minds to understand our distractions, to use our intelligence to "unpack" our distractions, to see if doing so can help us learn about the distress that necessitates the distraction. It is easier to pay attention to what distracts us than it is to attend to what requires the distraction.

To summarize where we have come so far in Advent: 1) insights appear which distress us and we find we are unable to engage and assimilate them. 2) These distressing insights are met by the urging to approach them thoughtfully and learn from them. If this is fruitful, change comes from the increased understanding; 3) some insights are too distressing to be approached thoughtfully, and we find we are compelled to avoid them through distractions of one kind or another. There is no change, but there is the same urging to approach being distracted in a thoughtful way to see if the distractions can tell us something about what distresses us.

The point of the third Sunday of Advent is that not everything that happens inside us can be cleared up, solved or resolved by our own effort. Some things are beyond us because we do not have access to the feelings or understandings that allow us to move deeper into them. John's urging us to be thoughtful is sometimes not enough. However, John's urging is necessary. It is a "voice...crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'." It is through the urging that is John that we come to understand that sometimes something other than and different from our own effort is needed if what we are facing is to resolve. The urging that is John's does not bring any resolution, and by this "failure" it straightens out our thinking about what we can do on our own and what we cannot do on our own; it thereby **makes us ready** to receive whatever more there is. The way this understanding appears in the text is as a statement about John: "He came as a witness to the light.... He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." What will come will enlighten, illuminate, what is now darkness to us.

This same understanding that something else is needed also appears in words attributed to John himself: "I baptize with water [immerse you in what you are familiar with]. Among you stands one who you do not know, the one who is coming after me;" Nothing is said here as to "what" will come, only that it will. The word translated as "among" is a preposition denoting "accompaniment." What comes will accompany us in our life.

The best way to summarize the third Sunday of Advent is to say it is concerned with our grasping our inability to modify our own internal situation. Something else is needed, and we learn that we do not experientially know what that is or how to find it. There is another Sunday in Advent which will address this situation more directly. But for now, and for a time, we need to engage the truth that we are sometimes not able to modify our own interior life.

[Jim Robie, 12-11-14, Cycle B, John 1:6-8, 19-28]