

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

RECOLLECTING OURSELVES FOR WORSHIP

Music (please use this time for quiet and reflection)

Gong [followed by silence]

Call to Worship and Lighting the 2nd Advent Candle

Hymn – 3 [Comfort, Comfort You My People]

Opening Prayer

OUR HUMANNESS AND GOD'S GRACE

Call to Confession

Unison Prayer of Confession

Gracious God, there are times when I am at a loss. It is as though something inside me has given way, and I am no longer certain about who I am and what I am doing. I keep living as I have lived in the past, but the reason I do so is no longer clear and the benefits I used to receive from the way I live no longer appear. I do not like this experience. There is a part of me that acquiesces to this experience and feels helpless in the face of it. There is another part of me that resists it and insists that it not be true. I find that the resistance is growing and becoming more insistent that I respond to it. I think the resistance has something to do with you; its presence kindles the hope that the loss can be overcome and what I have lost can be restored.

Personal Prayer of Confession in Silence

Assurance of Pardon

LISTENING FOR THE WORD OF GOD

Story for the Children

Scripture – Luke 3:1-6

Prompting

Silence and Reflection

RESPONDING TO THE WORD OF GOD

Hymn – 10 [On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry]

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 – 18 [The Desert Shall Rejoice]

Charge and Benediction

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

TODAY	10:00	Worship and Church School
	11:00	Coffee and Fellowship
	11:20	Conversation
MONDAY	12:00	P.W. Christmas Luncheon

Second Sunday of Advent

In order to make sense out of Advent, it is necessary to keep in mind that God is actively working to increase our ability to be aware of the life that is actually ours. This is compared to our concentrating on the life we want or believe we should have. God pushes against our tendency to ignore anything about our life which does not match what we want, or think should be true. Advent is a time when this “pushing” becomes apparent to us, because the customary way we think of and experience our life begins to erode in that we begin to perceive and experience ourselves differently. Thoughts, feelings and perceptions intrude into our awareness, which tell us that we are more than who we thought we were. These additions are not welcome since they cost us our sense of being at ease with our self.

Into this wilderness there appears a cluster of abilities which enable us to respond to this loss: namely, we become aware that something is not as we want/need it to be; plus, we become able to consider why that is the case; and also, we become able to respond to the loss by making efforts to reverse it and recover our sense of ease. This cluster of abilities is what Biblical mythology names “John the Baptist.” John appears when our internal stability is threatened and is what motivates us to attempt to regain it.

The appearance of John is a cause for rejoicing, since without this cluster of abilities we would remain passive in the face of whatever disrupts our internal stability. John makes us stronger in that he helps us hold onto what we believe is the right way for us to live. It is the appearance of these abilities that is highlighted and celebrated during the second week of Advent.

Paradoxically, the appearance of John is essential if we are to experience the fullness of the life we actually have. We will live for a while with John encouraging us in the hope that we can regain the stability we have lost. However, a time will come when we learn to see his limitations. We will learn that the fullness of our life needs to and does include truths about ourselves which at present we are unable to welcome and consider. But in the meantime, we live in the hope that life will return to the stable place with which we are familiar.

[Jim Robie, 12-6-18]

Lectionary Readings from Cycle C for December 16, 2018

Zephaniah 3:14-20; Isaiah 12:2-6; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18.

F.Y.I.

The Presbyterian Women’s Christmas Luncheon is tomorrow, Monday, December 10th, at Olwen Peterson’s home, at 12noon.

“Our small change can make a Big Difference.” Please give your pennies, nickels and dimes etc. to the Presbyterian Hunger Fund. A can on the table in the coffee room needs donations.

You are invited to share your holiday baking/cooking with us at the coffee time following worship. There is a sign-up sheet.

There is information on the Sing-Along Messiah in Santa Rosa, and also on the Christmas Toy Program run by R.P. Public Safety.

There is a sign-up for a Centering Prayer group to be held on Monday afternoons, at 1pm, at the church.

It is time to budget for 2019. There is a letter concerning this, as well as pledge cards, on the table in the coffee area.

Our Christmas Eve service will take place on Sunday Evening, December 23rd, at 7:30pm.

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Our web site is <www.faithpresbyterianrp.org>

Elders: Marolyn Bode, Jim Plein, Karen Kessel.

Deacons: Richard Egan, Mary Jane Beccaria, Wanjiru Muthamia.

Clerk of Session: Marolyn Bode: [H] 707-585-8350.

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Second Sunday of Advent – Luke 3:1-6

The four internal events that are highlighted on the Sundays in Advent prepare us for the internal event that is the subject of Christmas. Each Sunday in Advent focuses on an experience into which we are drawn and in which we are detained for a period of time. The verbs in the last sentence are deliberately passive, reflecting the reality that Advent is something that happens to us and is not something we do. We are taken through the experiences of Advent at a pace that is personal to us. Each of the internal events works changes in the perception we have of ourselves; and when the change has run its course, we find we are taken into the next internal event. These four internal events together make us receptive to and ready for a change in the way we experience and understand ourselves.

Last week was concerned with the first of these experiences, which was described as a specific instance of loss—a way we have understood, experienced, and/or defined ourselves is questioned as to its accuracy or validity, or it even evaporates. This loss that begins Advent is always an internal event; sometimes that loss is precipitated by something in the external world, and sometimes the loss occurs because of internal shifts that are not essentially related to what happens outside us. As a consequence, we lose the ability to easily inhabit our customary life. For example, a way we have spent our time no longer attracts us, or an understanding of who we are as a person turns out to be no longer satisfactory and/or satisfying. The feelings that accompany this loss will be on a spectrum that runs from ill-at-ease to panic. Always this loss is something that captures and holds our attention; occasionally it is sufficient to disrupt our ability to function.

The second of these internal events involves a response to this loss. Borrowing a metaphor from today's reading we might describe the loss we feel as a "wilderness." The Greek word actually means "lonesome," and implies "waste" or "emptiness." I believe anyone's first inclination is to dismiss this experience. Eventually, however, into this internal, experiential wilderness there appears what in mythology is named "John the Baptist." Using modern, analytical language we can describe "John" as whatever in us

begins to advocate for our facing the experience we are having, inviting us to think about and consider the loss we have experienced, and to make an effort to restore what has fallen apart. "John the Baptist" is the label in mythology for what we would describe as a cluster of abilities: to feel, to reflect on, and to respond to this loss we have sustained. These abilities work together to try and fix or repair the loss we are experiencing. We are drawn into the loss and immersed in the feelings it evokes; we reflect on what has happened or not happened to bring this loss about; out of that consideration we are moved to act differently. In the words of the text, John proclaims "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." The word translated into English as "repentance" is a word which means "compunction." Compunction means "a strong uneasiness caused by a sense of guilt." The Greek root is a combination of a preposition meaning "again," "amid" or "beyond," and a verb meaning "to think." I believe the idea in this word is that we feel uneasy because we are no longer able to be the person we have been, and our uneasiness motivates us to "think again" about the way we live, or to "think beyond" the way we understand and define who we are. We consider our loss, and we think about what may have caused it, and we try to think beyond our current way of thinking so that we can live differently and with less loss. The motivation for doing this is to be free of the loss and the feeling of guilt it generates in us, and to be pardoned for no longer having the life we have been living.

Enough cannot be said as to the importance of the abilities which John the Baptist is. His appearance in our lives as the awareness of loss and then the urging to come to terms with it are signs of grace. They are signs of God moving us along the path of conscious participation in our own human life. If these abilities do not form in us, we would be helpless victims of the internal changes that happen to us. Christianity's assertion is that God's desire is for us to engage the life that is ours and to participate in the unfolding of our life. These two internal events, the loss we experience and our response to it, are what begin that participation. Feelings form, and they move us to reflect; those reflections urge us to respond and act. Our immersion in these feelings, our reflection on where that

immersion takes us, and our acting on those reflections, “prepares” the way for what God will do with us. The Greek word translated as “prepare” refers to “internal fitness,” so the emergence of the abilities to feel and reflect and respond makes us internally fit to participate in God’s unfolding our life.

Using the imagery from the text as metaphors for what happens inside us, the exercise of these abilities to feel, reflect and respond begins a process that straightens or levels the path of God’s work of unfolding our life. A) What is out of sight/awareness (valleys) will be “filled,” [the Greek word means to make replete, which means “fully or abundantly provided or filled”]; in other words, what is below awareness surfaces in awareness and eventually gets addressed in a way that completely satisfies its concerns. B) What is too high and out of reach for us [mountains, in the sense of the unrealistic ideals in whose grip we are held] will be depressed or humiliated [“made low”], and eventually will become more realistic. C) The things about our life that are “crooked” [this word means “warped, winding or perverse”] will be made straight and true. That is, we eventually will be able to see the truth or level-headedness of the things about us that appear to be unreasonable and unacceptable. D) The things about us that appear to us as “rough” [uneven or rocky], and over which we stumble so that our lives wreck, eventually will no longer trip us up because we will see and understand them differently and more accurately. As this happens, our human nature, with all its frailties and passions will come to know God as its advocate and defender.

The church, in Advent, affirms the value of John the Baptist, the forming of this cluster of abilities to feel, reflect, and respond, as essential to what God will do with us. We are encouraged to involve ourselves with them and the way they help our lives unfold.

[Jim Robie, 12-6-18, 2nd of Advent, Cycle C, Luke 3:1-6]