

The Advent Of The Lord Is Now... US!

*“I Am Wondering...About Holy
Expectations”*

Zephaniah 3:14-20; Luke 3:7-18;
Philippians 4:4-7
December 12, 2021
Third Week of Advent

After Zephaniah, Before Luke and
Philippians:

The reading in Zephaniah follows previous chapters where much is said about the judgment deserved for the choices made...so this rejoicing... “be glad” we hear in our reading is grounded in reality and not a wished for happy ending or rose color glasses.

John the Baptist (in our next reading) returns us to the bigger picture/the real challenges. He issues a call to us. Not the “be glad” itself but what will lead us to it.

Sure doesn't sound like good news at first read?
What's good in this news?

Is the good that it's not too late and we have the possibility to make simple changes in our behaviors.... a change affirmed as already within each of our ability? We're not being asked to do something we can't do! Good!

Our gospel story honors John the Baptist who takes us as close to God as anyone had thus far, as far as he can. His notion was to get folk to be as faithful as he could and so survive the oppressive culture in which they lived by positioning themselves in the system differently.

And what he offers, helps, if we'll do it!

But John operates within the old unjust paradigm. Struggling to be heard, he struggled to know how to take it to the next plane, a new paradigm.

Jesus moves us to that new paradigm of what it means to be faithful.

Integral to being faithful is living in covenant community which will support you through challenge and offer you energized support/comfort, as you offer energized comfort to others...

John reminds us to look at ourselves as we really are.

Jesus teaches that with looking at ourselves honestly, comes a do-over...and He even shows us how... the way to live...and we'll help each other.

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And this third week of Advent,  
What a juxtaposition of images and feelings our readings offer this morning!

Two readings tell the people to rejoice, be glad in God.  
Do not worry about defending ourselves.  
Do what is just and so, know peace  
beyond all understanding...

and the other refers to the crowd who gathers (that be us!)  
...refers to them as a brood of vipers  
more interested in positioning themselves  
than they are in hearing God's call to repent....  
to actually do the do-overs offered!

So, which is it?  
Rejoice or Repent? Ahh....it's both of course.

Did you catch the phrase at the end of Philippians?  
It says that as you rejoice/be glad in prayer/staying close to God,  
you will experience an amazing peace that can  
guard your heart and your mind.

Not eliminate the threat/temptation,  
but guard your heart and mind.  
What threat?  
What's Paul talking about here?

For first-century believers, Paul's words are good news...  
an immunization, of sorts, for survival...  
for their fears were very real fears...  
Christians were being hunted, persecuted, and killed in Rome.

They do need a protection...for many were choosing to do the "right" things in the face  
of evil,

keeping their integrity risking physical harm.  
AND the protection offered and most needed  
is of their integrity/faithfulness, not bodily protection.

They need protection and Paul assures them  
they can trust in God's protection

which is an abiding peace in doing what is "right"

...a peace which surpasses the troubles  
this world can deal out!

**God guards your heart and mind  
so you don't become a threat to yourself  
by giving in or up or over  
your powerful integrity.  
A fate far worse than death.**

They had a choice to make (just as we do)  
...to be faithful or not! ...Walk the talk or not.

What most dearly matters **is** protected...  
as we center our lives on what is  
most important in life...  
as we make real choices...  
even ones unpopular and daring...  
counter-cultural choices.

Whatever happens to us physically in our lives,  
materialistically in our lives,  
whatever pain we may know...  
the pain that **really kills**  
is aloneness, abandonment, betrayal, shame, **loss of integrity.**

Paul reminds us these need not be our realities...  
for God is always with us.

No need for us to be "on guard" or "be guarded"  
...for what is *really* important,  
**God guards and no one can take from you...  
unless you let them.**

Meanwhile, back at the gospel lesson, long before Paul,  
before the persecution and even before Christ himself,

John the Baptist calls those who have beginning belief or a real need for things to be  
different  
to the realization

something *more* is required of them if they are to know God's peace and freedom.  
(Paul will agree!)

And this crowd, the one he calls vipers,  
they aren't intimidated by John's pushing them

because deep down they know he's right...  
we all know he's right...something **is** required of us.

So, they ask: "What then should we do?"  
And here it comes...he's gonna' tell them...tell us!

~Share what you already have. And more so!

~Be honest! Collect no more than is yours.

~Do your job honestly.

~Do not threaten or accuse or abuse the power you have at work or home or elsewhere.  
In the end, that gets you nowhere...  
as we all know.

He says....**Be satisfied!** Be satisfied!  
Live your faith with integrity each day and enjoy the riches of life you already have  
which are indeed *enough!* Quite enough!

Be Satisfied?

You mean be satisfied in a world that tells us we are not good enough until we have more than enough power, control, things, *and there is never enough!?*

We have to be satisfied? Oh no, Lord!  
Anything but that! Please!

You see, if you would be satisfied with your life and rejoice in the life you have just the way you have it...

*right now...even with all its challenges and unfairness and disappointments...*

*if you were satisfied/letting what is good fill you up...*

all the energy you now spend positioning and jockeying  
and defending yourself in our culture  
would be released to you to devote to compassion...

compassion toward yourself and others. Integrity!

Imagine how much easier it would *then be...*  
to avoid worldly temptation...if you were satisfied  
with your *quite enough* and not looking for more.

...filled by what works rather than  
focusing on what doesn't!

Imagine how many situations “dangerous to your soul”  
you would avoid.

You see, God doesn't want you to volunteer...  
or be nice or be good.

God wants you to change...for your *own* good.

God wants you to get off the rocky, bumpy road you have been traveling so far.

God wants you to change how you view yourself and others.  
You have the power to do this.

God wants you to share what you already have.

Be honest, do your fair part.

Don't threaten or accuse or abuse your power.

Be satisfied! Live with integrity!

God knows...

You've had quite enough and you have quite enough!

Rejoice (Fare well in life!) and know God guards your heart  
and mind as you live in these Holy Ways.

That crowd of vipers, had the nerve and the confidence to ask John what it is God really  
expects of them.

**Do you?**

At your holy center, when talking with God,  
would you ask God what is expected of YOU...today?

*You know...* during the arguing, when someone butts in line at the grocery store, flips  
you off when driving, asks you to give time or money in ministry,

interrupts your plan for your day with their needs,  
uses venomous language politically or religiously

***...do you...want to know what  
is expected of you?***

***Oh...you already know...***

During these most recent weeks  
of **gun violence and tongue violence  
and health and financial...violences,**

coinciding with some of our most holy Christian days,

have you asked God to help you know how  
to respond...what is expected?

~So...how many coats, shoes, meals, cars, activities, dollars, opportunities are enough?

~Are you being honest with others and yourself?

~Are you using your power for good...in just ways and do you embrace the fact you **do  
have quite enough power already  
to do what you need to do?**

**Are you satisfied with who you are? If not, why not?**

*Can we talk here, friends? Are you hearing this?*

Yes...we can talk and share because  
we're all on the journey together.

You don't have to feel bad about the answers  
to the above questions.

For you see...we all pretty much have the same answers!

God knows it. God gets it!

That's why baby Jesus is born again...  
so we can grow a very different life  
starting right now and right here...

...if you actually, really, will yield to the truth about yourself and us

and the counter intuitive power of God's  
redeeming love for you just the way you are!

If you will repent...do something with you about you!

Go beyond the mind you have to live in new ways.  
**Accept forgiveness** and *go beyond* the mind you have!  
And, you *will* rejoice...be glad!

**Again I say...we have been socialized by a culture that yearns to warp us toward  
discontent and fear**

because discontented fear makes us far more  
vulnerable to manipulation.

**Thereby making it is easy** for us to question ourselves  
(our integrity and faith understandings)

and doubt ourselves

and so give up and give over our power.

And give in to despair, cynicism, fear, apathy.

But we have the ability to hear and see what's going on around us more clearly  
and know deeply there are more choices than the choices culture offers.

We know reality is not some supposedly  
Objective **one** truth.

**Rather** reality is something we humans create by our own choices and responses. And  
we can choose again!

When we respond to John's admonition,  
when we are self-aware and ready to choose wisely,  
when we let our hearts, minds, and spirits experience  
daily gratitudes of hope, joy, love, and power,  
we birth a new reality, a new creation,  
as surely as Mary birthed Jesus, the life giver, two millennia ago.

As you make space in yourself to be glad,  
you will find yourself reenergized, taste divinity.

You are divine!

As you commit yourself to being glad you become an inspiration for others to dare to  
believe, *and therefore*,

dare to create God's realm right here, right now.

And. I know: A discipline of being glad is not easy...

but joy's not about the surface living of things or comfort at all.  
It's not the same as happiness.

To me, joy is a fullness, a resiliency...  
*an enveloping* gratitude that is peace and love  
with integrity.

Our work on earth is...

to explore, enjoy, and share the goodness of creation,

living into creation's goodness without reserve or hesitation.

**Knowing  
neither duty nor suffering  
nor progress nor conflict ...  
not even survival....is the aim of life.**

**Being glad is! Content.**

Deep abiding uncompromised joy is indeed a powerful and just peace!!

...Will I pay attention?  
...Will I let myself be astonished?  
...Will I tell about it?

Advent is taking place around me! It's in me!  
The Advent of our Lord is...US!

Be resilient!