

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, Dec 9, 2018

What Kind of Saviour is This? – Advent 2 - Peace (Luke 1:68-79)



**By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high
will break upon us to give light
to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.
(Luke 1:78-79)**

A lesson from Zechariah's canticle of thanksgiving

Every wonder why we do that 'Peace' thing at the beginning of the service? – I mean, really wonder – ponder what that messy milling about among the chairs is all about – John the Baptist's dad's song of joy contains the answer – it's about recognizing and sharing the redemption that God worked for the whole creation in Jesus Christ – mercy breaking upon us as light in the midst our darkness to open up the way of God's peace – every hug, every hand shake, every glance, every word, witness to that reality that comes to us as gift in Jesus Christ – my invitation, throughout what's left of this Advent & Christmas season, is to listen for this message of mercy, light, and peace everywhere you go – at work, in the mall, in the car, with your kids and grandkids, with your friends – just focus your attention and listen for words and signs of God's mercy, light, and peace – they are there – we just miss them so easily – and by missing them, by not paying attention *for* them, we contribute to the darkness – our light stays hidden under the bushels of our anxieties and fears – it does not break into the darkness with God's redeeming grace

Provocative points to ponder – as always, too many to cram into one sermon

- I found myself wondering how Zechariah's life went after singing this song – obviously, I had to use my imagination – but here are a few of the things that I considered:
 - A small farmer – let's say olives – bordering on the brink of being in crushing debt – as the taxes and tolls from various levels of the Roman and Jewish authorities were extracted to fund the largess of the politicians in the cities and the privilege of the priests in the temple – struggling to support his young family – but John grows up in this poverty and anxiety
 - A devout Jew – deeply aware of the problems and pains his ancestors have lived through – and of the stories of God's redemption at every turn – not a redemption that ignored their wanderings and follies, but one that forgave and reignited the invitation to participate in God's peace for the whole creation – found this especially within the prophetic witness of his Scriptures – passed it on to his son

- told him the stories of God’s mercy and guidance – How God would be our God so we could bless creation with him – participating in that blessing was our redemption
- An anxious father – when his son took up the prophet’s mantle in an extreme way and went to live in the wilderness, preaching justice, kindness, and humility to all who would listen when he came into a town – convinced that he was the voice crying in the wilderness making way for the Lord’s final coming – and finally, pointing to his cousin, Jesus, as the One in whom that was happening
- A broken-hearted father – when his son was arrested and beheaded – the confusing stories that swirled around related to the cause of the execution – the deep sorrow, and anger, and despair that must have engulfed him with darkness at that time
- And did he find peace in following his nephew? – that’s a question we can’t answer – but it did provoke my thoughts this week – could he see in the witness and deaths of both his son and his nephew the promised redemption of the God of his ancestors giving light to open the way of peace for all peoples? – I decided to give this imagined life a peaceful ending – Zechariah passing into the next realm of God’s redemption surrounded by his Christian family and friends, peaceful in the confidence that God had kept his promises and that mercy would disperse the darkness

Transformations this witness to God’s living Word in Jesus Christ might provoke ...



There is a drawing that shows up in my social media feeds from time to time – Seolgi, can we put that one up? – isn’t this a hope that moves your soul? – and if so, let’s not simply look for those signs of light in the midst of our darkneses, but let’s actively enhance them – let’s take that feeling of welcome that so many notice when they come to this little space of grace, that feeling that fills our exchange of the Peace of Christ, and make it more real in every encounter we have this coming week – let’s make it, with God’s merciful support, our way of being in the world

Your Notes

Prayers of the people offering thanks, seeking help, and being wowed

*[The form and flow of thanks, help, and awe is taken from Anne Lamott’s wonderful little book on prayer, **Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers** (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012).]*