

Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 2021 - 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Christmas - Year B

Jeremiah 31:7-14

Psalm 147:12-20

Ephesians 1:3-14

John 1:10-18

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

“No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.” This verse, the final one from our Gospel today is both beautiful and yet, at the same time a little frustrating!!

We may want to, desire to, crave to see God, yet we simply cannot. It may be our hearts' desire; to be able to gaze at God, to have our faith confirmed, and to put our hearts at rest. Yet John reminds us today, it is only Christ who has had this privilege. Not us.

And this desire seems never more apparent than during the times of our greatest need. Whether caused by illness, death, job loss, depression, loneliness, a sense of disconnection, or any of a myriad of other challenges this life entails, in times of great struggle we seem keenly, even cruelly aware that we are simply not able to see God.

And it is because of our human limitations that God becomes human that we may see God. In Jesus, God becomes accessible to us. It's what John Calvin called “God's condescension,” the eternal and immutable God becoming finite and vulnerable in order to become truly available to us. And because we have seen God in Jesus, we are emboldened both to live with hope as well as share with others the hope that is within us.

In the play "Green Pastures", which ran for many years on Broadway, playwright Marc Connelly has a moving and memorable scene. The Lord is anxiously looking out over the parapets of heaven, trying to decide what to do with the sinful situation on earth. Gabriel enters with his horn tucked under his arm. Sensing the Lord's dilemma, he brushes his lips across the trumpet to keep the feel of it and asks, "Lord, has the time come for me to blow the trumpet?" "No, no," said the Lord, "don't touch the trumpet, not yet."

God continues to worry with the problem. Gabriel asks the Lord again what he plans to do. Will he send someone to tend to the situation? Who will it be? Gabriel makes some suggestions. "How about another David or Moses? You could send one of the prophets: Isaiah or Jeremiah. There are lots of great prophets up here. What do you think, Lord?" Without looking back at Gabriel, God said, "I am not going to send anyone. This time I am going myself!!"

It is such a momentous event that I wish Christmas would last a little longer. We give Easter seven weeks, Pentecost three times that much, and even Lent and Advent six and four Sundays apiece, but Christmas is only twelve short days. And, truth be told, because of the shortness of our cultural attention span and the rise of New Year's Eve as a significant holiday, Christmas barely gets a week of our attention before it is lost in the shuffle of resolutions and bills and all the rest.

But these verses remind us that Christmas isn't just a season, it's a way of life. Christmas isn't over when we reach Epiphany, it is only newly launched once again. While the season may pass, the hope and life it promises are just beginning.

Christmas reminds us of God's decision to become one of us, to take on our lot and our life that we might have hope, and to share our mortal life that we might enjoy God's eternal life. This is not merely a season or celebration, it is a promise that requires our active participation every day of the year.

God's condescension simultaneously glorifies human flesh and endeavors. Our lives matter to God. Our welfare is of tremendous importance to the Almighty. There is no worry too small, no challenge too great, that God is not eager to share it with us. Indeed, God is eager to equip and empower us to share our worries and challenges, as well as our joys and hopes, with each other. As because of God's decision to come to us in a form we recognize, we are empowered to reach out to those around us.

So perhaps the opportunity that lies before us, on this second - and last - Sunday of Christmas, is to treat it as the first Sunday of a year where we emulate and actualize God's activity to come among us in grace, mercy and love that the light might continue shining on in even the darkest of places.

Because we are reminded, in Howard Thurman's wonderful poem "The Work of Christmas" that this is where our work really begins. Let me finish with his words:

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
when the star in the sky is gone,  
when the kings and princes are home,  
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,  
the work of Christmas begins:  
to find the lost,  
to heal the broken,  
to feed the hungry,  
to release the prisoner,  
to rebuild the nations,  
to bring peace among the people,  
to make music in the heart.

Let us strive to live the Christmas life. For this is a promise too good to contain to only twelve days. Blessed Christmas and a New Year of grace to you and yours.

Amen