

Sunday 19th December, 2021
4th Sunday of Advent - Year C

Micah 5:2-5a
Psalm - Song of Mary
Hebrews 10:5-10
Luke 1:39-45

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

There is a great richness to our Advent season. One of the things I most like about this season is how each Sunday gives us an opportunity to really hear and reflect upon a new theme which might enrich our journey.

On the first Sunday in Advent we explored the theme of hope and courage, and we were reminded that we need not fear, if we truly believe the promise given by God that, through Christ, all has been redeemed.

The second Sunday spoke to us of the universal nature of God's reign - how all people shall see God's salvation, and that this salvation is often expressed and testified to in the smallest of ways, which are easy to miss if we are not alert to them.

Then, last week, it was all about joy - about rejoicing. On Gaudete Sunday we explored how God was the source of our joy, because of what God has done, is doing, and will do; in our lives and in the world.

And so to today. The final Sunday in the Advent season. And although we lit the candle of love, today is all about mercy. Mercy. It's not a word we tend to use much in modern parlance, is it? I wonder how you would describe it, as a concept?

According to one definition, mercy is the "kind or forgiving treatment of someone who could be treated harshly; it is kindness or help given to people who are in a very bad or desperate situation."

Not bad - although I would want to argue that the words 'kindness' and 'help' don't quite do justice to the depth of the action which results in mercy being shown. But, nonetheless, it's not a bad attempt.

In fact, I suspect that mercy is difficult to explain, as a concept or a construct. But when we *experience* it, we know. That's one of the things about mercy, I think. Mercy as a noun is difficult to grasp, hard to put your finger on. But mercy as a verb - "she showed him mercy" - that's another matter. Because when we experience mercy we know that we have been treated in such a way that shows us that this person thinks we are worth something, that we deserve the attention of this other person - that we have worth as a human being.

This morning, Mary, in response to the message of the angel, breaks forth into singing. "God has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Yes, Advent holds many themes, but the witness of Mary reminds us that Advent is about God's promise of mercy.

I feel as though, as a world, as a society, we really need to hear that right now. Remembrance of God's mercy. Can we even recall what it feels like know mercy? To feel mercy toward others? To extend mercy? Well, even if we can't, God does. There's the promise we receive, thanks to Mary.

And this is from someone who should know. Because what is clear to us is that not much mercy was ever extended to her. For all intents and purposes, she should have been overlooked, even rejected. She should have been dismissed from her community, distrusted, disbelieved, and doubted. She should have been silenced, separated out as one not worthy of God's love, let alone one trusted to testify to God's love for the least in the world.

Which is why in her song she has to give witness to how much God's mercy matters, what difference it makes, for her. In her case, it meant that she was seen and regarded. She was cared for and called. She was lifted up. And because *she* was, so also all of the lowly will know that promise, too. This is also God's promise -- that those we would assume are "against" God are remarkable witnesses for God.

So, this week, on this last Sunday in Advent, my question to you is this: what difference would it make if our starting point were mercy? If we sang Mary's song? A song to sing instead of talk of indifference and intolerance? A song to sing instead of speaking words of hate and fear? A song to sing instead of closed mouths, unwilling to speak up for or speak out against? Mary's song would make our world a different place, a better place, a place where we might even catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God.

Sing Mary's song. And maybe, just maybe, mercy will abound again.

In the name of God. Amen.