

December 20 2015

Year C Fourth Sunday of Advent

Scripture Lessons ~

The Magnificat

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.

For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever.

Colossians 3:12-17

Luke 2:1-20

what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Reader: This is the word of our Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Sermon *Hope of All the Earth*

The pastor was at a restaurant and at the next table where he was having his breakfast was a man who was punctuating his reading of the morning papers with deep groans and great discouragement. Each page of the current national and international news brought forth more profound sighs expressing the man's frustration of the world around him. A well meaning and friendly young waitress became very concerned as she poured him another cup of coffee. "Is everything all right, sir?" she asked with alarm. "You seem very upset about something this morning?" "You bet I am, haven't you read the morning paper? I am sick to death of all of this bad news," he answered with a great deal of disgust. "You have got to have hope" the young woman said timidly. Well the man's response was a classic one, anger mixed with frustration. And the question he asked the waitress, I think, in on everybody's lips these days. **Hope**, how can you have hope in a world like this? How do we answer that question? Because how we answer is a key issue, I think, of the Advent Season.

I don't know if you remember the psychologist Tom Menninger, a few years back. He was a shrewd observer of our time and he wrote these words which sometimes ring true to us during the course of our week. "When it comes to hope our shelves are bare." "When it comes to hope our shelves are bare." If we do not have hope how are we able to generate it then and sustain it in this kind of a world? The authors of many of our Christmas Carols believed they have found the key to hope. The ones which we just sang this morning included. O Little Town of Bethlehem How still we see thee lie Above thy deep and dreamless sleep The silent stars go by Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light The hope and fears of all the years and met in thee tonight.

And another one which we sang a few weeks ago, an advent carols. Israel strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art The desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

Well first like the carols and the lesson from Luke's Gospel for today, are addressed to fearful people as well. But in this case shepherds who when they saw the star in the middle of the night and when they heard the angel's voices speaking to them, they knew for sure that this was going to be bad news. It is a little like having your telephone ring in the middle of the night or in the old days when you used to received a telegram. It must be bad news or why didn't those people call during the course of the day and if it was good news why didn't the angels come during the daytime as well. These shepherds were in fact according to the King James version were "sore afraid." I loved that phrase "sore afraid." But the first thing that the angels did was to reassure the shepherds that they were bringing good news of great joy to them.

We know that the worship in the Jewish temple the priests often sacrificed lambs on the altar. In order to make sure that they were always amble supply of worthy lambs there were special herds of sheep kept in the area. And we believed in fact that it was these same shepherds who were abiding in the field. So it is possible that these shepherds who were attending the lambs were used for sacrifice on the altar were the very first hear to the good news of the birth of the Lamb of God who would himself take away the sins of the world. These then were special shepherds to have their immediate concerns relieved and their fears removed. Jesus coming into the world can first of all remove our fears and secondly while the text was addressed to those locally shepherds, it had implications for the whole world for it goes on to say, "I bring you good news of great joy which will come to all the people. The hope that God has provided was not just for shepherds of Bethlehem. It is hope for the entire world.

You know, I believe, God has created each of us as human beings in such a way that until we come into a relationship with our creator in some way we are somehow unfilled in life. We are not truly ourselves until we find ourselves in

Jesus and as Christian followers of that person. God the creator is for us also the God the Savior in that sense as St Augustine, once said, “Our hearts are restless until we find rest in God.”

A man once wrote to Albert Einstein and asked him to describe the theory of relativity in words so simple that he might see a small glimpse of their meaning. Einstein answered him saying that he could not do what the man requested but if the man would call in his home in Princeton; Einstein would play what he wanted to know on his violin. Human words have their limitations. Some things cannot be reduced to mere words for us to understand. God, too, has a message that God wanted to give the whole world and God tried and tried over the long centuries but for some reason that message was incomprehensively for many people in the world. So here is the message that the world might understand the birth of a baby; everybody in some way can understand the birth of a baby. There was no way that we could possibly miss this message of love that was meant for all people in the world; for every single person one this earth was born in the same way. It is kind of experience of universal hope that we can all relate to.

Third like the only other universal experience beside of course, taxes, is death. The angel doesn't refer to the baby born in Bethlehem, in this case, born this day in the city of David as just a newborn baby but was, also, the Savior who is Christ the Lord. Not a newborn baby but a savior. The fact that a baby was born was not the end of the good news that came to us; but he was, also, a savior.

You know when our boys were born that was enough to make us extremely joyful. The fact that they were born was good news, we didn't need an angel claiming that they were something special or that they were the best looking, the smartness, the wisest sons ever born upon the face of the earth. We didn't need that kind of reassurance; the fact is they are the best looking, the smartness the wisest sons ever born on the face of the earth and the fact they are, is something they don't need to be reminded. It was joy enough for us humanly speaking but I have a feeling that not all of you on the face of the earth, rejoiced with us at the birth of our sons. The angel was saying here the new baby born in the manger in Bethlehem had the potential for making everyone on this earth joyful, not because he is just a baby even though we mostly all like babies but because this baby is a special baby who is the savior Jesus Christ. And we all need saving from something in this world; sometimes we need to be saved from ourselves; sometimes we need to be saved from human nature; sometimes we need to be saved from the mistakes of the past; sometimes we need to be saved from death itself.

How then can we have hope in the world like the one in which we live. Well ultimately we can't because our hope is not in this world or in our efforts to bring in the kingdom of God on this earth. Our **hope** is in the God that loves us and loves

this world so much that he sent Jesus in a body for us. The hope of all the earth.
And together we say AMEN.