

Jordan Station United Church

December 5, 2021

Advent 2: Peace

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Sermon based on Luke 1:57-80

The message of hope for the future, especially an uncertain one, begins by recounting sacred history. That is why we gather. That is why we are here...to tell the sacred stories and find within them God's promise and our hope.

A solid home, is built on a solid foundation. Jesus once told the story of a foolish man who built his house on sand, and the house was washed away. The other man, wisely built his house on rock, and the house held up against the tests of time. Metaphorically or literally, this is good advice.

Last week I invited us to envision a KIN-dom, a KIN-dom of God, promised to us by God. It is a home that we have never seen, but that we long for, that we are homesick for. This KIN-dom is to be built by us, with God as our guide. And so, at this point in time, in the history of our world, our church and our lives, as we begin to rebuild in a time of uncertainty, I think it would be wise for us to take great care in the laying of this new foundation.

Zachariah and his wife Elizabeth's houses were built on a foundation of priestly ancestry. They had been faithful servants of God their whole lives and they followed the guidelines and traditions of their faith. And yet, they longed for a child throughout their lives and well passed Elizabeth's menopause. And then one day, while Zachariah was ministering at the altar of incense, taking part in the rituals of his priestly duties, an angel appeared to him. God showed up in an unexpected way to tell Zachariah that he would have a son, he would name the son John, and John would prepare the way for the Lord. Not surprisingly, doubt welled up within Zachariah and he questioned the angel, asking for a sign so he would know that what the angel had said was true. The angel, identified as Gabriel and sent by God, said that because of Zachariah's doubt he would be struck dumb, not able to speak, until the day that these things came to pass. In this story of Zachariah and Elizabeth, and the miraculous birth of John, we see how John's birth and life is interwoven with the story of the birth and life of Jesus. Zachariah, Elizabeth and John are laying the foundation for the building of the KIN-dom.

When John is born, and Zachariah's voice is restored, and his imagination is also restored. When Zachariah acknowledges God's faithful presence in their lives, and the lives of their people, Zachariah makes room, makes space, and helps in the building of a foundation of love for the growth of the KINGDOM.

But before Zachariah sings his praise to God, recognizing this faithfulness and celebrating his acknowledgement of the fact that God sees us, God knows us, God's awesomeness is present in this time of Advent, of waiting, the neighbours express their bewilderment.

Why are traditions being broken? The story tells us,

"Fear came over all their neighbours, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, 'What then will this child become?' For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him."

They know traditions are being broken. Something is going on. And God has something to do with it.

Zachariah's voice is restored, and with it, his imagination. Why? Because in his inability to speak during the 8 months before John is born, Zachariah is removed from his ancestral legacy, and is able to see God's movement in their lives from a new and fresh perspective. In that way Zachariah is no longer at the centre of the story, but assists God by following God's way.

Zachariah is filled with the Holy Spirit and sings blessings into John's being with a hopeful vision for his child's future.

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them...
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.
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."

Zachariah's song for his son John, shows us that when building God's KINGDOM, we would do well to remember there is power in the words that we

speaking, to anyone, but especially to our young ones as we lay the foundation for their spiritual homes. (Elder Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri)

In what ways might we practice surrendering our traditions so that we might fully participate in the greater work God is calling us into? How can we prepare to discern and embrace our uncertain future? What can we do to help assist in the laying of a solid foundation for the KIN-dom?

Luther E. Smith, ordained elder in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Atlanta, Georgia writes: "Perhaps contemplative listening to God's messengers in [our] own season of silence is a means that will give depth to [our] spiritual vision and guide [our] feet "into the way of peace."

May it be so. Amen.