

First a Review: Advent I

We began Advent with John the Baptist preaching about repentance. But in talking about **repentance** I suggested for listener then as today, John the Baptist is really talking about the **fear factor**. He is saying, “**God is coming into our midst and we have to wake up and stop fearing what’s going on. We have to be part of the solution.**”

John the Baptist makes his challenge to the religious rank and file, the serious folk who come to him from all over Judea and even Galilee. They are living in dangerous, fearful times under the State Sponsored Terror of the Roman occupation. John tells them **God** is coming to avenge the situation and only their sinfulness is delaying the event. He places his **hope** in a violent **God** coming to clean up the world and rid them of the Romans, if enough people re-enact the Exodus and entry into the Promised Land through John’s baptism of repentance.

Jesus quickly moves away from John’s program going further into the wilderness and resurfacing far away in Galilee. For **Jesus**, **hope** must be based on a compassionate **God** connecting and blessing all life.

Jesus realizes that **God** is already present.

God’s compassion refuses to destroy human life.

God only works with us, as we are willing to join in the solution.

What appears to be a delay, says **Jesus**, is simply **God** waiting for us while we are waiting for **God**. **Jesus** realizes that **God is among us as Hope-in-action**.

So the compassionate hope **Jesus** offers goes like this;

Hope-in-action is participating with a **God** who doesn’t destroy people.

Hope-in-action recognizes **God** expects us to do the very things we expect **God** to do for us.

You see, **hope-in-action** is helping others to help themselves, to help others to help themselves... **Advent begins with hope, a journey from fear to compassion.**

Advent II

The second Sunday of Advent begins with the strange tale of two conceptions, *John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth*. One occurs to one too old. The other occurs to one too young. One conception requires divine assistance. The other requires divine intervention. Both conceptions are considered scandalous.

So, both births require a **wakeup call**. The angel **Gabriel** is sent to enlist the main characters, to get Zechariah and Mary to wake up to **God**’s Dream. **Luke**’s gospel requires a whole host of angels to get the shepherds to wake up and become the

first witnesses of **God's** grace come in human form. So we looked at **angels** the second Sunday of Advent to recognize the angelic **wakeup call** in our lives.

In our sanctuary, we are surrounded by angels in our stained glass windows.

Six angels in the Chancel window

Five angels in the south transept window

Five angels in the north transept window

One angel in the south side window

One angel in the narthex window

These **eighteen** angel images with their banner messages in our windows remind us that **God's** dream for our lives is communicated through angels.

You see, the spiritual realm is **not** some vast, empty space, somewhere far away. Rather it is right here, within us and between us, all around us, just teeming with messages of *hope, peace, joy and love*. It is filled with moments and opportunities of grace and blessing. The gift of **God's peace** is just hanging in the air, when we understand angels as moments or opportunities of connecting with the Mystery in the midst of life. The radiant **peace of Christ** that passes all understanding is just a brush, a breath, a **wakeup call** away. **Angels** bring these messages, these blessings.

You see Advent doesn't come without angels.

So become an angel for someone this Advent and Christmas.

Advent III

As we drop in a little further along, on our Christmas story, on Advent III, we are touched by **tenderness**. No other season or observance focuses on **tenderness** the way Advent/Christmas does, and especially on Christmas Eve. No other season calls forth our **compassion** like Christmas.

Compassion in the scriptures comes from the ancient-world concept '**to feel with the womb**'. It is that deep connectedness that comes from sharing womb. It is that profound commitment toward the fruit of one's womb. And this is what is going on in our gospel lesson on Advent III.

Mary and Elizabeth each are feeling with their wombs, physically and metaphorically and the experience is spilling over through recognition, prophesy and song. **Rejoicing** erupts as **Elizabeth** and **Mary** meet and feel their wombs working overtime and share the **tenderness** of bearing **God's** dream into the world.

Compassion tied to tenderness brings them and us all the way to the cradle of the **Christ Child**. There is a mood that draws us in: An aura of tenderness that touches our hearts. It is **Compassion tied to Tenderness**, that **hoping** and

recognizing and **pledging** and **giving of the best**, which wells up in us as the **Joy** of Christmas.

But let's not forget that Mary and Elizabeth also knew rejection, loss, shame, disgrace. One too old and one too young in the family way was scandalous to say the least. Remember Elizabeth was in 'seclusion' and Mary was headed into hiding with her. Yet they responded to each other with **compassion tied to tenderness**.

You see, only **compassion tied to tenderness** responses adequately to real pain and suffering. Only **hoping** and **recognizing** and **pledging** and **giving the best** are the appropriate responses to rejection or loss.

So, **we recognize** the tenderness. **We feel** the tenderness.

We share the tenderness. And **we rejoice**.

For **Compassion tied to Tenderness becomes Joy**.

Luke 1: 57-66; 67-80, Luke 2: 1-7 Advent IV

How are we doing this Advent/Christmas?

Who is **hoping** for a green Christmas this year? They are forecasting double-digit temperatures for Christmas Eve Day.

Who is at **peace** with all the raw, drizzly, overcast weather this month?

Who is **enjoying** being out in the early evenings, dangerous darkness with no reflecting snow to reveal pedestrians and cyclists and curbs and potholes?

Who is just, **loving it** this Advent Christmas?

Well, I'm not!

I was supposed to go skiing this past week with my brother and we had to cancel. Driving home after work each day in the drizzle and the darkness feels like being caught in a scary movie.

Christmas without snow offends my northern sensibilities.

So, I'm just not **feeling** the **Love**.

And this gets me to complaining;

"Why can't life just work out?"

Why can't the kids just come when they said they would?"

Why all the jumble of inconsistencies?"

Why the imperfect and the unexpected?"

And in the midst of my drama the angelic answer comes back: ***"The paradox of life is this, the imperfect and the unexpected are the usual ways love enters our lives. So start to recognize the difference between what is emotional and what are true feelings."***

Well that got me remembering, Philip Johnston's response to all my drama; "It's not what we want but at least the roads aren't icy and slippery so far this Christmas." And then I remembered our scripture stories this morning.

The neighbours didn't expect the long awaited birth to *Elizabeth and Zechariah* to wind up with the one and only heir being named **John**. Personally I think it is a good name and a great choice. After all John means 'Heavenly Favourite'. But in ancient times if anyone should have been named for his father, *Zechariah*, surely this was the one. So that sure wasn't perfect or expected, but better than nothing.

Mary and Joseph didn't expect their firstborn child to be delivered in a stable full of farm animals. It seems anything but perfect. They didn't expect their firstborn to be laid in a manger instead of a cradle. They didn't expect unkept shepherds to barge in, in the middle of the night. I doubt that they wanted anything like this. Non the less the unexpected, the inappropriate, the less than optimum, the imperfect, the coarse, the impure, all shape our Christmas story of divine **love** entering our lives.

When we expect everything to be normal or predictable:

When we want everything about Christmas to be perfect and keep us in our comfort zone.

When we get cranky, whiny or angry when things don't just work out easily, we get all emotional and find ourselves far away from God.

We confuse emotions with feelings and miss out on the mystery in the midst of life.

You see, we are not our emotions. Emotions have a role to play in our lives, but too often they distract us. As they build us into drama, they usually turn us toward complaining and judging and the negative. I have to admit that getting upset rarely gets me closer to love in my life. Have you noticed this happening to you too? We miss the opportunity to love, when we get caught up in our little dramas and this includes being grumpy.

But then something breaks that spell. An angel message clears the air challenging our assumptions. ***"The paradox of life is this, the imperfect and the unexpected are the usual ways love enters our lives. So start to recognize the difference between what is emotional and what are true feelings."***

Friends, we need to stop over identifying with our emotions and start recognizing our deep feelings. Feelings don't judge or complain or get all worked up. Rather feelings connect us, open us up, move us to trust, or help, or accept, or commit, or

serve the common good. Deep feelings, true feelings are empowered and motivated by **love**.

We can dial back the drama or the grumpiness and reconnect to our deepest feelings of *identity, guidance and respect*. I am sure that is what Zechariah and Elizabeth did, and every faithful follower does.

We can turn down the emotions and reconnect to our deepest feelings of *connectedness and compassion*. I am sure that is what Mary did and every new mother does.

We can turn down the emotions and reconnect to our deepest feelings of *responsibility, care and commitment*. I am sure that is what Joseph did and every participating father does.

We can dial back the drama or grumpiness and reconnect to our deepest feelings of *acceptance and belonging* for this brings us into love for the whole world, where we learn to feel with **God**.

Application for Today

Listen to the wakeup call of Advent.

Dial back the little dramas.

Intensify your deepest feelings that feed your relationships.

Allow the imperfect and the unexpected to bring you into the **love God** gives. Amen.

Meditative Prayer

Let's connect to God's love; follow your breathing inward.

Come to that prayerful place deep within.

Rest in the Mystery in the midst of life.

Let go any upsets, dramas, or grumpiness, you may be experiencing.

Let go of the tendency toward these emotional eruptions.

Open up to your deepest feelings of identity, guidance and respect, like Zechariah and Elizabeth and the faithful.

Open up to your deepest feelings of connectedness and compassion, like Mary did and every new mothers does.

Open up to your deepest feelings of responsibility, care and commitment,
like Joseph did and every participating father does.

Open up to your deepest feelings of acceptance and belonging that brings us
into love for the whole world.

Open up to feel with God.

Let the imperfect and the unexpected bring you into the love God gives.

And now let's pray as Jesus taught us saying;

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;

and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power,

and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.