

Sermon – Luke 3: 1-6 Advent 2

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

This week, I had the absolute pleasure to make the journey down to beautiful Raymond Island in the Gippsland, and stay at The Abbey for an ecumenical conversation on the Gospel of Luke. There were about 90 people attending from all over the Gippsland and some from Melbourne too, and the conversation was led by the two bishops of Gippsland, one Anglican and one Roman Catholic, as well as two world leaders in Gospel theology, Professors Dorothy Lee and Frank Moloney. It was such a special day on so many counts. The Gospel of Luke was examined and broken open for us by two amazing teachers, and the two bishops reflected poignantly on how their churches and communities were making an often times painful journey in being the relentless prophet that Luke calls us all to be. It was also good to see Richard so settled and so clearly right in this role to which God and the church has called him.

And as I reflected on the day into the evening, listening to deep, slow call of the owls sitting in the trees outside, I wondered which of the gems I could share with you today, and I couldn't get past Frank Moloney's description of the Gospel of Luke. This Gospel has so many unique and compelling stories: the lost Son, the Good Samaritan, the road to Emmaus, stories that focus on the Lukan concept of journey and God's limitless compassion. And the snippet of the Gospel that we hear in today's reading is a good starting place to explore these themes.

Chapter 3 of Luke's Gospel marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. He starts by locating this important moment with the known people of the time. He does this because, as he says in chapter one, he is writing an orderly account for us, so that we may know the truth, the truth about God. Luke anchors important God moments within the flow of the then current human events.

And in this chapter, John the Baptist is going all around the Jordan valley proclaiming the salvation of God. Luke draws on the word of God, as it was known back then, the Torah, specifically using text from the prophet Isaiah, to emphasize and illustrate this new prophet, John's points. The prophet Isaiah was proclaiming God's promise for the restoration of Israel to the exiled Jews in Babylon. Luke uses this text to bring God's promise to Israel to the fore, but with a twist. In Luke's version, "all flesh shall see the salvation of God". God's compassion is not limited to the people of Israel.

And it is in this bigger picture that we see the whole picture of Advent. A picture which moves across time and race. A picture which includes the promises that God made to the people of Israel, a picture that includes the birth of Jesus, of God coming into this world in human form, a picture that includes his death and resurrection, a picture that includes the now and not yet world we live in today, a world that is on a journey to that holy mountain, where the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord, to quote more Isaiah.

This time of Advent. This time to prepare. And preparation is the theme of the day. We hear it in the Old Testament reading from Malachi.

“Thus says the LORD God: See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight – indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.”

And in the Song of Zachariah found in the first chapter of Luke

“And thou, Child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people: for the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God.”

This is Advent, a time to remember that we are all connected to each other, to creation and to God. But how do we as a gathered and worshipping people of God prepare? Well, I think Paul has something to say about this in his opening prayer to the Philippians when he says.

“My brothers and sisters, I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.”

We are to thank God every time we remember our blessings, pray constantly, even with joy, and to share the Gospel. How about this for our Advent preparation?

How will you thank God? Will you meet Jesus in prayer? Or perhaps you will meet God in worship, in the music, the liturgy, in holy communion. Will you see Jesus in the people around you? Will you meet God in scripture, in the stories of his humanity and his divinity? Will you share this Gospel? Will your love overflow?

This Advent, will you intentionally develop your relationship with God, and through that, with your fellow brothers and sisters? In whichever way that you choose to connect with God, remember, that God is with you and all of us, on our journey, and that God is a God of limitless compassion, promising salvation to us all and preparing a place for all of us at his table. Amen.