

Rev. George Arceneaux

12/17/23

Advent 3

Friends, this morning of the third Sunday of Advent and of our stewardship Sunday, I hope, in humility, that you might hold and ear for and a consideration how you might be called to pledge and to give to the good and the work of St. Christopher's. And that committing of yourself to St. Christopher's can be one way of living into the Gospel's call to love. One of the reasons I say that St. Christopher is a place that is dedicated to that work of the gospel is because it is a place that can wrestle with one of the most wonderful and infuriating aspects of our faith.

Even though I am challenged by that reality at times, I love Christianity's affinity for contradictory truths. Our faith embraces the strangeness that is inherit to our universe. We live in a universe where light is both a particle and a wave, where the mathematical expression π repeating is also 1, that, to quote the author John Green, some infinities are bigger than others. And we participate in a tradition where God is both three and one, where the God of the genocides of the Hebrew Bible is the same God of love, and of course where God almighty is manifest in the vulnerability of a newborn. And the seeming contradiction this morning from John the Baptist's encounter with the religious leaders of Jerusalem, the contradiction that makes up the goal of the gospel is this: That we remember who we are doesn't matter all that much. We're not special. AND that we are infinitely special, that our lives have meaning and value too often beyond our understanding.

John the Baptist is about as good an example of this sort of seeming contradiction that we can get, even though the priests and levites sent by Jerusalem's religious leaders don't get it. See, they come to John who has gotten a name for himself. John already has the title of the

baptizer, becoming famous for ministering to droves of people. John was. as he is now kind of a big deal. So those religious leaders ask John, "OK everybody knows you, you're baptizing people and we wanna know. Are you the Messiah? And John says no. Are you Elijah and John says no. Are you the prophet? And John says no. Well who the heck do you think you are? Asks the leaders. John responds basically by saying he is nobody. He's just a guy. A voice crying in the wilderness.

What'And so John reminds us of the whole trajectory of scripture. That, despite the stories we tell the histories in inherit the notions of grandiosity, we may ascribe to others be the heroes of the past, or the Jeff Bezoses, and presidents and rock stars of the present ... the humility of John reminds us that we are all just people. That as Dickens wrote about the hope of Christmas, that remember we are all fellow passengers to the grave.

I haven't made it clear, I don't think that John is exactly the most upbeat character in the Bible. Which is why I'm so grateful that we have today in addition to our Gospel, the Magnificat. The song of Mary.

I didn't really check with him on this, so my bad Kurt, Kurt Amolsch, one of the kindest people that you will see on a given Sunday morning here set the tone for my advent certainly when I did not expect it. It was the midst of a Bible study with him and others, and we began to bring up the magnificat. Now Kurt, Kurt is a fabulous singer, and has performed with gazillion different arrangements of Mary's words of the Lord greatness, and the blessing of her spirit by the almighty and the hungry being fed. And speaking to his story of his history with those words, the emotion that welled up in him infected me such that I hold of that feeling even now.

The joy of Mary's song is not the joy found in the hearts of the power hungry, nor of those bitter towards their fellow human beings. The joy of Mary's song is the joy of the choir singing its heart out. The joy of our 8am crowd coming together again and again to share an

hour of their lives. It's the joy of seeing kids on a Sunday morning distribute communion, and pray in gratitude for video games and play sardines in the basement and bag toothbrushes and gloves and tampons for those that need them.

That joy is for every one of us, even though in the grand scheme of our world, we're not that special. John was just a man crying in the wilderness. The mother of God was woman living in a time where she was seen as little more than the wife of a carpenter. We are each of us, sons and daughters and children, doctors and volunteers and ministers and mothers and fathers. Just as countless others have been before of us.

And yet we are each of us new and exciting and priceless, especially in the eyes of the creator. New joy, new goodness is what God hopes for you and promises you that it will be manifest in ways we do not always immediately understand. And as we await for the abundant mysteries of our lives to unfold, the promise of God's mercy is made real and direct from kind words, or coats donated to migrants finding themselves strangers in a strange land. In the Diet Coke pick up for your wife. I don't know what it is for other spouses but that one works out for me. And I'll slip into this list, the joy of God is made manifest in that PayPal information you submit to give through breeze online.

This church is a weird thing. We live in a world where you can go to reddit or facebook and find whatever group of people you might want to based on whatever may align with your life. We can go to the comfort of our own homes to be entertained by streaming services or delivered food or video games. It's a weird thing having a place that does the same thing Sunday after Sunday as it always has and always will. Where we come together with our stories, revealing a little bit of ourselves and making something new together every time we come to this table. Our world, our Church is a little weird. So was that dude crying in the wild. So was that mother who gave birth. I hope you consider how you can help keep this little church in the village of Oak Park a little weird. I hope too that you can feel some of if not a whole lot of

Mar's hope and joy expressed this morning as we also follow John. I hope you remember that yes none of us are necessarily anything new. We may not be that special. But you can help another person feel loved. That? That's special.