

ROOM IN THE HEART

The Rev. Geoff Parker to Foreside Community Church - Falmouth, ME

Thursday, December 5, 2019

Scripture: [Matthew 3:1–12](#)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SCRIPTURE

Generally, if you ask people to tell you Advent, they will tell you about the calendars... which as the kids said last week, are most important because of the candy they now dispense. I'm not entirely sure if it runs contrary to the Spirit of the thing these days, but adults all seem to be sharing Advent calendars with their favorite adult beverages in them... which I think says more about our relationship with the beverages than the season.

We do not often talk about Advent as a season of waiting... despite the calendars... or especially as a season of preparation. Indeed, Advent was imagined as time in which the church would prepare itself again for telling the story of Jesus being born, and hence God becoming especially present in our world and in our lives.

But it is that season... and so we tell the stories of those who prepared for Jesus... including his not-safe-for-work cousin, John the Baptist. When we meet him today, he arrives with prophetic bona fides from Isaiah the prophet and the psalms... but he also comes with a message that many do not expect.

SERMON

Time for a true confession I could only make after the Christmas Fair: I am a lousy preparer of Christmas celebrations. I don't mean Christmas *worship*: I think we've got good plans cooked up, and I hope you'll come on Christmas Eve. I mean, Ye olde "Decking of halls with holly". I am an infamously anxious and poor purchaser of presents. I can get obsessive about the distribution of lights on a Christmas tree to a level that can be paralyzing. And, generally, the style that has been come to be known as "Christmas" runs contrary to my own: as Julia said last night, "your problem is that nobody ever made a Bauhaus designed tree-skirt or stocking."

Minimalism is not a thing for Christmas. Except: for a voice crying out in the wilderness...

Today, we're continuing on with our Advent series about incarnation, and a little about Isaac Watt's hymn, *Joy to the World*. Last week, we talked a little about how we might think about, the Christ, or in some places "the Word" being part of God's expression of all creation... as the theologian Richard Rohr puts it:

instead of saying that God came into the world through Jesus, maybe it would be better to say that Jesus came out of an already Christ-soaked world.^[1]

This cosmic expression of God through creation *was* long before Mary held her baby, and yet somehow that baby came to embody the whole cosmos of God's love. So, along with rocks, hills and plains, we imagined somehow all creation indeed joins the song of joy.

Today, I want to think a little more about our role in all this... though at one level we could just stop and say this, when we say that God's incarnation is for all creation... let's all just remember: we are a part of creation... not some weird extra thing on top.

Now...

Depending on your household, you may not agree with it, but in the pattern of reading the scriptures in the church... it can never be Christmastime unless at least a few people get called a brood of vipers. John the Baptist was no fun at parties, unless you like very messy, mean parties...

John the Baptist came to prepare the way... preaching repentance before Jesus came into his ministry.

metanoia, here, "repentance" for us, too often means something like "shame." It's not. It's turning around... more specifically here, turning towards God. It doesn't ask you to feel bad about anything so much as it asks you to move in a new direction...

In this case, John is essentially saying, turn around and act like God is in all things, because God is about to make that about as clear as God can!

Isaac Watts would come to write in 1719: "Let every heart prepare him room." In other words, there is something that invites us to prepare for the coming of Christ in Jesus, and in us.

I want to first say that part of preparation may be the time that you leave free... the space that is not filled... the quiet between songs or parties... I might challenge you to find that. Maybe even preparation means recognizing the space in which beloved traditions or even friends or family have been lost.

This may not be an entirely peaceful process, but it is the peace that I think we are called to find.

Also though, There is a difference between seeing and recognizing, Richard Rohr says... he says of Paul, but probably just as easily John, who:

knew that the Christ must first of all be acknowledged within before he can be recognized without as Lord... God must be revealed in you before God can be fully revealed to you. ^[2]

I notice that this is not an easy step for many. I often find that of Jesus's two commandments: "Love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind... and love your neighbor as yourself" It is the very last part, "yourself" that tends to be the originating weak link. We tend to not have a healthy love of self, and hence a pretty shaky love of our neighbors, and hence... well, God.

Remember those t-shirts and bumper stickers from years ago? "Jesus is coming, look busy."? I wonder if this season of Advent and John's preaching could be, "Jesus is arriving in you... act like it."

Because if Christ can be present in me... then also in you... then also in the next... all the way through all human life, and all life... But the challenge is to make room in our lives for that arrival.

I hear in our public debates, including about the very basic things like food... is there room for all of us in our common life?

Even if you think that there is no room in your life for the Holy... or in others... I have news. This is my second Advent here, so now you get to find out what my traditions are... because traditions are just things that you've done more than once. Turns out, I will always read you this from one of my patron saints... for you who might feel that you know not how to prepare, or like you cannot make room for Christ, or that the world has hemmed you in so much you can see, much less recognize Christ:

Into this world, this demented inn, in which there is absolutely no room for him at all, Christ comes uninvited. But because he cannot be at home in it, because he is out of place in it, and yet he must be in it, his place is with those others for whom there is no room. His place is with those who do not belong, who are rejected by power because they are regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied the status of persons, tortured, exterminated. With those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in this world. He is mysteriously present in those for whom there seems to be nothing but the world at its worst.^[3]

The Good News here is that Christ has and is and will come... come a dwell within each and all... And even more, that we will recognize that same Christ in everyone and everything in the fullness of time.

It has been the insistence of every empire that ever was that there is no room for the power of God in the world, because there is a limited supply and the emperor has it all.

Just remember that this story we tell in this season is not that God has limited God's power and presence to some other ruler, who just happened to be born in a stable. Rather, God has insisted that that power and presence is so limitless, so freely flowing, that it has come *even* where there was no room, where it was least expected, in the most fragile life born on the outskirts of all that was...

So as we celebrate that birth, take time and nurture the birth of God in you, in the friends and family we gather with, no matter the state of our decorations... in one another... in the last and least...

Christ is born today, tomorrow, in you, in all...

Make room. amen.

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1. Rohr, Richard. The Universal Christ (p. 14). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. ↩
 2. Rohr, Richard. The Universal Christ (p. 42). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. ↩
 3. Thomas Merton, "The Time of the End Is the Time of No Room" in Raids on the Unspeakable, pages 51–52 ↩