



Sunday December 13, 2020
John 1:6-8, 19-28 (Third Sunday in Advent)

Pastor Christian Marien

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Rabbi Hugo Gryn was sent to Auschwitz as a little boy. In the midst of the death and horror of the concentration camp many Jews held onto whatever shreds of their religious observance they could. One cold winter's night Hugo's father gathered the family in the barracks. It was the first night of Chanukah...the feast of Lights. The young child watched in horror as his father took the family's last pad of butter and made a makeshift candle using a string from his ragged clothes. He then took a match and lit the "candle". "Father, no!" Hugo cried. "That butter is our last bit of food! How shall we live?" "We can live for many days without food! We cannot live for a single minute without hope. This is the fire of hope. Never let it go out. Not here. Not anywhere."

Here we are in the season of Advent. We began the journey weeks ago and find ourselves somewhere in the midst of our travel. Albeit – traveling without most of us leaving our homes. Are you tired? Perhaps. For our impatience, our anxiety, our loneliness. Are you still waiting, watching, praying, hoping for what you will find at the end of our journey? I know I am. Still, somewhere in the depths of our hearts we have the fire of hope within us. And today that fire is kindled with the word of John the Baptist. "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness." In the wilderness. This voice. It calls to us. This voice calls us to leave the old ways of the world for the ways of Jesus. You and I only need to quiet our own voices to hear the cry of the one in the wilderness. "I baptize with water, said John. Among you stands one whom you do not know, 27 the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." And this one who is coming. What is his name? He is known by many. Emmanuel—God with us. Christ—the chosen one of God. Son of God. Prince of Peace. King of kings. Lord of Lords. But we only need know him by the name given to him by God, spoken by his mother and father during his first moments of life—his name is Jesus (Jeshua) for he will save his people from their sins.

When we hold onto the hope of believing that Jesus Christ is alive among us, our Christmas preparations are not for a coming event but rather for clarity of vision to recognize what is already here. For those of you lucky enough to need correction for your eyesight...do you remember the moment when you realized that perhaps you were in need of glasses? I did not know that I needed glasses—contacts—until someone pointed out to me that what I was seeing was not the whole picture. For how long did my eyes strain to focus from the back of the classroom? How often did the lights blur at night while I was driving? For how long were the trees large green blobs instead of individual leaves gathering together to shape the trees I was watching? My contacts offered me a clarity of vision—the opportunity to look beyond what I thought I was seeing to see that which needed to be seen.

In Advent, we are offered the chance to see the world dimly lit and through the incarnation, the coming of God in Jesus, we are able to see the world through the light of God's love. This day the light may shine dimly. But a day is coming when the light will outshine the darkness. Today—we may walk through darkness. But there will be a day when the world will know darkness no more. This day—in this journey of Advent—we may be lost in the heavy shadow of night. But joy will come in the morning. We may be heavy with grief. Weighed down in our pain—our shame—our own personal prisons may keep us blinded to the light. This pandemic may cause us

to doubt the presence of our God. But I tell you the day will come when the light of Christ will shine. A day when a new heaven and a new earth will rise, and we will see the world by the light of God's glory.

Today, we celebrate the third Sunday of Advent. It is the Sunday of Joy. Joy in our relationship with God. Joy in the journey with Jesus. Joy in the promise of the resurrection. Joy in the grace and mercy of God. Joy in being alive and giving thanks for each and every day. This is the joy which God offers to the world. It is the joy God wants us to know and to live for ourselves and for the world around us. It is this joy that God calls us to carry into the world. Yet for you and for me this joy is not always clearly seen in the eyes of our Savior let alone in the eyes of God's children. We are the ones who wait with hope. We are the ones who are called to seek peace in the world. We are the ones who are called to live out the joy that comes from our God in the world.

In this time of Advent, we are invited to wait for what is coming. And God knows, we are not very good at waiting. Just ask any kid with a smartphone waiting for a Wi-Fi connection. Today we hear the words of John, I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. And the voice—it should bring us joy. This voice—these words—should excite us and pierce us and lead us into the world. This voice—these words—they should wrap us in the very power of God and lift us up that we might bring life to the world. This voice of John—the one crying in the wilderness—at first it was simply John's voice in the wilderness. One lone voice barely heard in the midst of the wilderness. God invites you and I to join the cry. Prepare the way of the Lord. It is our joy to lift up our voices to cry with John in the wilderness. And if this world we live in is not a wilderness to those who follow Jesus—then I do not know what a wilderness for the people of God is. This voice of John the Baptist should bring us joy and I know at times it brings us fear. I know at times we are afraid. At times we are deaf to the needs of those around us. At times we are so very small in such a very big world. But God calls us to joy. God calls us to live in the light and to overcome the darkness, if even by the light of a single candle lit in hope or peace or joy. God calls us to walk in the light and to trust that the light of the world will never be overcome by the darkness. God calls us to be witnesses to the world of the power of God present in the love of Jesus for all the world. And so, we call on God in the midst of this Advent.

Holy God, Come with joy to our hearts that we might go with joy into the world. Come with peace O God. Come with hope that as we seek to hear the voice of John the Baptist crying in the wilderness you will show us the way to the joy of your Son, the Christ, the one we call Jesus. Amen.