

ReMembering Resources

VOL 1 Part 2 Advent/Christmas Dec. 12th – Dec. 19th 2010

December 12th, 2010

Third Sunday of Advent (Year A)

Calendar

The Third Sunday of Advent continues the waiting theme through John the Baptist's waiting in the prison at Machaerus. This Third Sunday of Advent is often called "Joy Sunday" by publishing and church supply companies, and not a few bulletin services. That term made sense when Advent was understood primarily as a penitential season. That has not been the case in the Western Church, at least since Vatican II (early 1960s); and the Revised Common Lectionary adopted by our church in 1992, and all mainline Protestant denominations in the U.S. concur. Advent isn't about penitence, but about preparation. And the texts for today aren't really about joy, but about waiting and expectation for divine reversal of the powers that be. Rejoice, by all means.

Readings from Lectionary

Matthew 11:2-11.

John the Baptist in prison sends a question to Jesus: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

11:2 When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples

11:3 and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

11:4 Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see:

11:5 the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

11:6 And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

11:7 As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind?

11:8 What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces.

11:9 What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

11:10 This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'

11:11 Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Psalm 146:5-10

146:5 Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God,
146:6 who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever;
146:7 who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free;
146:8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous.
146:9 The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
146:10 The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD!

Color: Blue or Purple

Sermon: There will be no sermon this Sunday in lieu of the Christmas Program

Reflections

The First Layer – Christian Teaching and Tradition

In this layer we focus on the Apostolic teaching of our Christian faith.

John the Baptizer in Matthew's Gospel is less certain about who Jesus is. In the Gospel of John there is no shadow of doubt in the Baptizers mind. *'The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'* John 1:29-30 In the passage from Matthew above the

followers of John are sent to ask Jesus if he really is the one - *"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"*

'Why do we have such a different images of John the Baptizer offered by the gospels? Is there anything in these different images of John the Baptizer that might help us to better understand this season of Advent?

Yes there is a lesson here. An important lesson. We can clearly see here that our understanding of who Jesus is was unfolding during the period in which the Gospels were written. As Matthew's Gospel was being written the members of that community were anxious to show that Jesus was greater than John the Baptizer. Thus John is reported to have doubts, to be uncertain. More to the point, Jesus is reported as the one with certainty and full understanding. By the time the Gospel of John is written the believing community has no question about the superiority of Jesus over John.

In our time this issue seems almost irrelevant. Of course Jesus is superior to John the Baptizer! Jesus is the Christ! Jesus is Lord! John the Baptizer is only a prophet who pointed to Jesus. We know these things. We take them for granted, but there was a moment in our history when this issue had to be decided and understood.

The point is: Have you decided who Jesus is in your life? Is Jesus just another prophet in the long line of prophets who preceded him or is He something else, something truly unique? As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus again this Christmas are you prepared to acknowledge that He is LORD, that He is GOD? And is He truly your Lord and God?

The Second Layer – Methodist Heritage

In this layer we focus on what our Methodist way of being Christian offers to us in this area.

As part of our Methodist heritage we are blessed to share in the lives of John and Charles Wesley. They lived open

and honest lives. Though I am sure there are aspects of their lives which remain properly private, they opened themselves to a level of scrutiny most of us do not dare attempt. We are comfortable in our privacy and are rightly protective of it. As John and Charles strove to answer the call of Love in their lives they invited the world in.

This writer believes that one of the most blessed gifts we have been given by these brothers is the fact that they were not afraid to admit when they had gotten it wrong or when they had misunderstood.

During the period at Oxford when they created The Holy Club they believed that the only way to live so as to please God was to live pure and perfect lives of Holy piety. They examined the moment to moment experience of living and measured how they lived against what they believed the Scriptures demanded of them. The one thing they were always certain of was that they were constantly failing in some degree.

Struggling to answer the call of God they responded by applying themselves as completely as they could to living lives modeled on their own understanding of what God demanded of them and they discovered it didn't work. The gift they have become to the world is first expressed in their ability to try something different.

At the Aldersgate Meeting John found the answer he had longed for. He was converted, changed, made new. He describes the moment as both a moment of spiritual insight and a moment of physical change...

That evening he reluctantly attended a meeting in Aldersgate. Someone read from Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About 8:45 p.m. "while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through

faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

From that moment on John lived from moment to moment with an assurance that he was loved beyond sin and doubt. He had been living within a carefully built house of Holy Living which had the effect of keeping those in need of Love outside but when John finally let Love in an explosion of new life was given to the Christian Church.

Every Advent we are challenged to see the world as God sees it. We are asked if we would do as God was pleased to do. Would you trust yourself to a world full of selfish people with Love as your only defense? From that moment in Aldersgate John Wesley answered yes again and again.

Do we see this world as God sees it? Do we, like John Wesley, declare "The World is my Parish?"

The Third Layer – Wigington's Corner.

In this layer we focus on the history of St. John's U.M.C.

Did you know?

You may be surprised to know that from the founding of our church in 1828 until the year 1897 our church had no name?

It's true. For almost 69 years our Methodist congregation worshiped in various houses of worship none of which were given a name. The first house of worship our congregation used was probably the home of one member or other. The second house of worship we availed of was the well-

known log cabin church which was located near to West Benson Street. It was built in 1830.

Our third house of worship was built in 1858 and was a simple wood-frame building with steeple. That building served us until 1888 when our first brick-built sanctuary was built. This building was ill-fated as it was built on unstable land. It was finally decided in 1897 that we should no longer be referred to as Anderson Station and that a name should be chosen. According to Georgia Marshall Fant in her work *“A History of St. John’s Methodist Church”* (1968) “No longer was the charge known as Anderson Station or the church (known as) the Methodist Church in Anderson. After being without a name from 1828 to 1897, it had been named St. John’s by unanimous consent.”

From our point of view we look at St. John’s and, perhaps, find it difficult to imagine that our church was ever much different from what it has been and continues to be for us. The truth is we can never experience our church as others have experienced it in past generations. Nor should we demand or expect that future generations do everything just as we do. One of the great gifts we are given in Jesus is the gift of being able to experience Jesus in our own time. Jesus is with us and for us in our time and in our place. Just as we have built and torn down and rebuilt again every time the needs of our church have required it so each of us may sometimes need rebuilding. The important difference is this; your name has been known to your Creator since before time was time.

From God’s perspective you were never without a name.

December 19th, 2010

Fourth Sunday of Advent (Year A)

Calendar

Church Calendar: This is the fourth Sunday of Advent, and Advent's waiting nearly (but not quite) gives way to Christmas joy and celebration.

Readings from Lectionary

Isaiah 7:10-16.

Prophecy in a time of national crisis: "Your problems will be resolved by God, Ahaz, by the time the child born to the pregnant woman over there can make moral choices."

Isaiah 7:10-16

7:10 Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying,

7:11 Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.

7:12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.

7:13 Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also?"

7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

7:15 He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good.

7:16 For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19

80:1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth

80:2 before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might, and come to save us!

80:3 Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

80:4 O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?

80:5 You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure.

80:6 You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves.

80:7 Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

80:17 But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself.

80:18 Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name.

80:19 Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Color: Blue or Purple

Sermon Title: A Beacon Fire

God set before the Israelites the sign of the beacon fire to show them that God would deliver them. The beacon fire was the prophecy that Emmanuel would be born. What does that beacon fire say to us?

Reflections

The First Layer – Christian Teaching and Tradition

In this layer we focus on the Apostolic teaching of our Christian faith.

In our reading from Isaiah, Ahaz, king of Israel, was living in a "bunker mentality." He was hunkered down in wary fear of what the Kings of Syria might do next, and even in fear of what God would do if he dared to ask for help.

The good news offered through the prophet was that God was already at work to eliminate Ahaz's reasons for hunkering down. The good news is that the solution would come quickly. When the child to be born to one of the young

women in the court was old enough to start school (we might say), Syria would no longer be a threat at all.

The news of "God with us" in this text, then, is not looking forward to some future Messiah, but to God's present help. The insight Isaiah offers here is that God is not waiting for us to ask for His help. God is already acting as "God-with-us" (Emmanuel). Again we are reminded that God is not limited by our imagination. God acts as God acts, not as we would have God act.

Later in Isaiah, in chapter 55:8 we find the following words "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,*" declares the LORD. If it were up to us we would have God act for us in some obvious and showy way. Isaiah says that God's help would come and may not even be discerned as it was unfolding. But it would unfold, just as surely as the child would grow and mature to the point of being able to make ethical decisions.

Discussion:

What happens to us in our congregation when "bunker mentality" sets in?

What happens when we convince ourselves that it is all up to us?

Are some of us there now?

What sign of a hopeful future is God placing in our midst -- what reminder that God IS with us - even in the face of whatever we fear?

What do such signs help us to do to move beyond the bunker and trust God's provision, protection, and promises to manifest His Kingdom everywhere?

The Second Layer – Methodist Heritage

In this layer we focus on what our Methodist way of being Christian offers to us in this area.

This is an excerpt from a letter written by Samuel Wesley, John's older brother. He wrote it to John shortly after their father's death and after John had migrated to Georgia along with Charles.

"My father's death left my mother as you know - she has been arrested for 30 pounds, as perhaps you remember ... I have since paid the money and cleared the matter. Another has sprung up, Mrs Knight threatened the same usage ... so I have sent fifteen pounds and that devil too is past ... You may have provided for my mother's subsistence, if I should die ... it is well ... nor will any unkindness ever disturb me, after you have robbed me of Charles."

John's decision to leave England caused his older brother great upset. Their father's death in 1735 had left their mother and unmarried sisters in financial distress and Samuel junior, who had health problems, had a family of his own to support. To make matters worse, John persuaded their brother Charles to migrate to Georgia with him.

John Wesley's determination to pursue a personal objective regardless of the effect on other people was sometimes an unattractive characteristic. TO SAY THE LEAST!

At this point in his life John had yet to experience that Aldersgate moment. He and Charles were striving to respond perfectly to the call of God in their lives and, if the writings of John himself are anything to go by, they were both perfectly miserable.

John had no thought for the difficulties his other siblings were enduring. He was solely focused on achieving Holiness through perfection. He was living his life patterned after his own understanding of that which God required of him. He had yet to learn that God's way were not John's ways!

Are we sure that our plans are better than God's? As we prepare to celebrate the Birth of Christ are we prepared to let God take the lead?

The Third Layer – Wigington's Corner.

In this layer we focus on the history of St. John's U.M.C.

In the Narthex there is a memorial dedication to Lidie Green. She was the wife of the Rev. J.W. Wolling. Have you heard of her before?

Let me tell you her story and relate her story to today's lesson. Lidie or Lydia Green Wolling was born on July 11th 1854 in Lee County, SC. She was four years younger than her husband. They married on May 7th 1878. They came to Anderson in early 1883 to serve the Methodist congregation in our church which was then known as the Charge at Anderson Station. The Rev. Wolling was our Pastor from 1883 'til 1886 and Lidie was much loved by the church for whom she worked tirelessly.

The Wolling's served our church well during a period of great renewal. It is unclear if they were the reason for that period of renewal or simply lucky enough to have experienced it. For them that period of renewal led to a decision to travel to Brazil as missionaries. They traveled to Brazil in early 1887 to begin their missionary work but on December 27th 1887 Lidie died. She had contracted malaria and was only 33 years old.

I am sure that her family and those closest to her have kept her memory alive. Thanks to our own U.M.W. under the leadership of Sally Lane, then president, Ann Holden and Jane Jowers, we are able to do more than simply remember a name on a plaque. We know who Lidie is.

Do you imagine that the Wollings had any notion that a decision to serve would lead to such loss?

If you and I knew all that life would bring to us would we be able to live?

And yet.... And yet the One who has to know all that ever was and ever will be chose to embrace the touch of human justice. The Father must have known all that would befall the Son and still God has chosen to love us eternally.