

November 27, 2016

1st Sunday in Advent and 1st Sunday of the New Church Year

Texts for this week's Blended (Traditional) Service:

Psalms 96 & 122 (ESV) Isaiah 2:1-5 (NIRV) Romans 13:11-14 (NIRV) Matthew 21:1-11 (ESV)

Sermon Outline



New Through Hope - A reflection on Isaiah 2:1-5

Intro – This Christmas Season we are drawing focus and inspiration from the appointed psalm for Christmas, Psalm 96. The key verse is a familiar one – “Oh, sing to the Lord a new song!” Our emphasis is on being made new in Christ. During Advent, we focus on the coming of God as we prepare our hearts. This week, our emphasis is on HOPE.

I. A Word about the Text and its Context

- a. Written about 800 years before the coming of Jesus. It is a prophetic text (“It shall come to pass in the latter days...”) pointing to Jerusalem as the place to which “all the nations shall flow”. The prophetic picture is that, from this mountain, God’s Word will go forth into all the world.
- b. What will the world look like when this comes to pass? It will be a time when people come to learn the ways of God. It will be a time of judgment. And – most significantly – it will be a time of peace. “They will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”
 - ✓ **Key Point** – Whatever else may be said of Isaiah’s vision, it must, surely, be said that it overflows with HOPE! The world, as we know it now, will be different. Isaiah was given a vision of the end of the age. BUT, it is, also, a vision of the coming Christ, who will usher in the beginning of that new age. When Jesus comes, the angelic army sings a new song – “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace...” The coming of the Christ is the beginning of what God intends – for all creation and for each of us!

II. A Word about Being Made New through Hope

- a. What is it like to live with little or no hope? Basically, it’s akin to not living at all! Hope, whether voiced as such or not, is the belief that, beyond this present moment, there is another moment that will be better. It’s the heart of our faith – if anyone is in Christ, the old has gone and the new has come!
- b. By the power of God’s Spirit in Christ, we are being made new, through the trials and difficulties of our lives; through Word and sacrament; through prayer; through the mutual consolation of the faithful that is the church; and through witness and service in his name. Being made new, through hope, involves many things. It certainly involves living through whatever trials we are undergoing, holding out for what lies ahead.
 - ✓ **Key Point** – The story of our Lord’s life is one that invites us, and empowers us, to live with hope. He came into the world as a homeless person. He fled from persecution as a refugee. He was rejected by many, including his friends. He suffered horribly. He died a criminal’s death. He was buried in someone else’s grave. AND YET, at the end, he rose from the dead! All this – God with us – so that he could, also, be God for us.

Closing – We are given new life through faith in Jesus Christ and, each day, we are being made new as God’s Spirit works in us. This is our HOPE. And now, having been made new, we are called to be God’s instruments to bring hope to our world, through witness and service in his name.

All Glory to God alone! — Pastor Neil Buono

November 27, 2016

1st Sunday in Advent and 1st Sunday of the New Church Year

Text for this week's Contemporary Service: Romans 13:8-14 (NIRV)

Sermon Outline



Made New Through Love

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. (Romans 8:8, 11)

Intro – Our focus this Christmas season is on being made new. Our theme verse for the season is from Psalm 96 – “Oh, sing to the Lord a new song!” The guiding question for us, as we make our way through this time of year, is a simple one: How does the incarnation of God, in the person of Jesus Christ, shape our lives today? This morning, our emphasis is on being made new through love.

I. The Incarnation makes all things new

- a. The coming of God into time changes all things. Before Jesus, God appeared for short periods in various forms. With the birth of Jesus, as the Son of God, the prophetic word of Isaiah was fulfilled – “and you shall call his name Immanuel”. Read – God with us! We also know from the apostolic word of Paul that Christ makes all things new – “For anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old is gone; the new has come!”
- b. The incarnation begins the salvation narrative, but it is not the whole of it. The picture, for the sermon, captures the fullness of how God makes all things new in Christ. The shadow over the manger is the cross!

✓ **Key point** – God with us is God for us!

II. We are made new through God's love

- a. The coming of God, in Christ, is the coming of love. The birth, life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is how we know God loves us, and it is how God makes us – and all creation – new again.
- b. A story of being made new through love – Christina's story.
✓ **Key point** – No wonder we're invited to sing a new song! In and through the power of God's Spirit, in Christ, we can find our true and best selves and live the life God intended for us. It all starts with the coming of God. It starts with the incarnation in all its fullness.

Closing – Salvation is nearer than when we first believed. This Advent, Christmas and Epiphany we're invited to receive, again, the gift of the holy child into our lives, that God's love can work a new thing within us and among us. God grant this to us all!

All Glory to God Alone! — Pastor Neil Buono

This is Christina's story. She's a fictional character so she bears no resemblance to any real person. Her story, however, may well resonate on many levels. Because while the details are fiction, the essence of the story is quite real. It's a story of how true love can transform us and make us new – still the person I am but more the person God created me to be.

Christina grew up as the oldest of three children to an absent father and an alcoholic mother. While she had most of the simple material things for life she and her siblings lacked an essential – the love of their parents. Christina was about eight years old when her mother was preparing to go out drinking again. She pleaded with her mother to stay home but her mother ignored her. Once again, Christina tucked away deep into her psyche a painful lesson about herself – she wasn't good enough or lovable enough for her mother to stay home and care for.

As Christina got older, her mother's drinking worsened and eventually Christina and her mother became estranged. She continued into her young adult life to seek her mother's love and never to find it in the way she needed it most.

When Christina started dating it didn't take long for her to get into other unhealthy relationships. She continued to seek from intimate partners the love she never got as a child and – of course – it didn't work. It didn't work because Christina didn't know what it was she needed and her many partners didn't either.

Christina was headed down the track of self-destructive behavior, all the while looking for that missing love to make her feel whole. You can imagine where it went at times.

Then one day Christina happened on an older, homeless woman who befriended her. The woman had nothing to offer Christina but her presence. The two became friends and Christina would go visit her each day after work, sometimes for a few minutes and at other times for hours. When the weather began to turn cold, Christina invited her friend into her very modest home and the two shared at least a roof over their heads and a warm place to stay.

The homeless woman gained from Christina the material means to survive. Christina gained from the homeless woman something no amount of money could ever buy and that transformed Christina in ways she could never have imagined.

What was the thing Christina got from this person who had nothing materially substantial to offer her in return for her kindness? Christina got from her a priceless gift – from this person that had been kicked to the curb and marginalized, Christina was given the gift of unconditional love and acceptance. In the homeless woman's eyes and heart, Christina was good enough to love just the way she was, in all her brokenness and all her need.

The older woman's love made Christina whole and new again. How could this be? How could such a thing happen?

This is the Gospel in its application – when we are finally accepted the way we are with all our brokenness and humanness and frailty and imperfection, we are at last free to change and become the person God created us to be. Unconditional love sets the conditions for God to make us new with his love, whether we recognize it at that point as God's love or not.

Christina and the homeless woman eventually were befriended by a Christian who welcomed them both into her church home. Today, many years later, these two women run a shelter for women on the streets. Their love for each other set the conditions for God's love in Christ to make their lives new and to let them become all that God created them to be.