

December 11, 2016

3rd Sunday in Advent

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

Psalms 146 (ESV)

Isaiah 35:1-10 (NIRV)

James 5:7-11 (NIRV)

Matthew 11:2-15 (ESV)

Sermon Outline



New Through His Coming – A reflection on Isaiah 35:1-10

Intro – We continue our focus on being made new and singing the new song of Christ. This week's reading from Isaiah is a text rich with words of hope, peace and JOY. The heart of the text is God's promise that beyond this present travail there is a new day of redemption that is coming.

I. A Word of Promise

- a. The heart of the text is captured in verse 10 – “And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing.” Who are the ransomed? In Isaiah's prophecy, he was speaking, initially, to the people of God who would be taken into captivity, following the end of his prophetic ministry. But really, who are the captives of any age?
 - b. The captives are those in spiritual bondage. That's all of us! To those who return to Zion with singing, there is the promise of everlasting joy and the “assurance that sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” This is a picture for all who long for the deliverance that God alone can bring.
 - c. In that day, *“the eyes of the blind shall be opened... waters break forth in the wilderness...”* The picture is one of Shalom – peace in all its fullness.
- ✓ **Key Point** – Through Isaiah, God promised a new day for his people.

II. A Word of Promise Fulfilled by God Himself

- a. The heart of the text is captured in verse 4 – *“Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come... He will come and save you.’* The promise is that God, himself, will deliver his people from their captivity.
- b. This is the promised new day fulfilled in the coming of God's Son, Jesus of Nazareth. Recall the question asked by John the Baptist, when he was in prison – are you the one? Our Lord's response is to point him back to the promises in Isaiah: *“... the blind receive their sight and the lame walk...”* In Christ, God came to fulfill his promise, and to usher in the new day for all who are spiritually captive.
- c. To be noted, John the Baptist's condition was a dire one. He was suffering in prison, and would eventually be killed. In the day of captivity we hold out for the day of deliverance! And God does, and always will, deliver us, because God is faithful!

✓ **Key Point** – Our Lord faced his own day of captivity when he humbled himself to the cross for each of us. In so doing, he gained for us God's promised deliverance for all who long for it.

Closing – The theme for the third Sunday in Advent is JOY. As has been wisely observed, joy is not the absence of suffering, so much as it is the presence of God. In the coming of God in Christ, he has made us new, and given us THE reason to sing a new song!

All Glory to God alone! — Pastor Neil Buono

December 11, 2016

3rd Sunday in Advent

Text for this week's Contemporary Service: James 5:7-11 (NIRV)

Sermon Outline



Made New Through His Coming

Be patient, therefore, until the coming of the Lord.

(James 5:7)

Intro – We continue our focus on being made new and singing the new song of Christ. Last week, we looked at how the incarnation makes it possible for us to be made new through hope. This week, we focus on being made new through His coming. The text from the Letter of James exhorts the faithful to a time of waiting for his coming. In our waiting, we are invited to be patient and steadfast.

I. A Word about waiting and being made new

- a. Advent is a time of preparation as we WAIT for the celebration of his coming in the incarnation. What do we do in our waiting? It's a time of reflection, as we ready our hearts to receive, anew, the gift of Christ – a reflection often centered in our need, and in the promise of God to meet our need.
 - b. At the same time, we believe, teach and confess as Lutheran Christians that BY FAITH we, ALREADY, have the presence of God in Christ in our lives. Even so, we wait for his coming more fully.
- ✓ **Key Point** – Perhaps most importantly, in our times of trial and difficulty, we wait for his coming to deliver us from our present affliction. It is often that such times in our lives deepen our faith and we are made new in the process.

II. A Word about being made new through our Lord's Coming

- a. Waiting can be, and often is, an important activity that deepens our faith in God. As we cling to the promise of his deliverance, we draw strength to stand firm in our affliction, and to not lose hope. We look forward to the JOY that awaits us, and, indeed, are often able to find it even in the midst of our darkest days.
 - b. A story of being made new through His coming – Eric's story.
- ✓ **Key Point** – We can find strength to face whatever affliction has come upon us because the One whose coming we celebrate faced the greatest affliction of all – separation from God AS OUR SIN BEARER! He did this, looking past the cross, to the joy that awaited him. FOR US!

Closing – We cry out to God to deliver us. So often, God comes to us with his promised presence IN OUR AFFLICTION. In those times, even though we are still in the midst of whatever we are facing, his presence makes us new and that changes everything. The coming of God in Christ changes all things. His presence in our world, and in our lives, opens the possibility that we can be made new and sing the new song of Christ, even in the presence of sorrow and suffering. What greater gift is there than the gift of His presence in our lives!

All Glory to God Alone! — Pastor Neil Buono

This is Eric's story.

Unlike the previous stories I shared over the last two weeks, this one is not fiction. It's a true story about being made new by God's coming in Christ into a man's life. It's not so much a story about radical conversion as it is a story about recovering a faith learned as a child and lost because of the struggles and vicissitudes of a severe mental illness.

I met Eric when I was doing the jail ministry many years ago now. Eric was incarcerated waiting trial for arson. It wasn't until much later that I learned that fact. I just knew he was waiting. What I didn't fully appreciate was ALL that he was waiting for.

I recall at one point when I greeted him and asked him how he was doing he said, "O Pastor Buono, I'm better than blessed." Really I thought. Where is that coming from?

I learned in time, through conversation and observation, that Eric was a man of considerable faith. He grew up in a Christian home here in Topeka and he learned of God's love in Christ for him. Unfortunately for Eric, faith alone was not enough and eventually severe mental illness derailed him.,miuo?"

In six years of jail ministry and in many years of counseling ministry, he is the only person I know who was judged by the court to be mentally not competent to stand trial. Eric goes in and out of reality even when medicated and when not properly medicated there's no telling where he may end up. He and I have journeyed together through some interesting times and places.

Through it all, one constant for him has been his faith in God. He would tell you he hasn't always been aware of God's presence in his life but then again he hasn't always been aware of his own presence either. And yet, it is his faith in God and specifically his belief that God did a new thing in Jesus that has sustained him. He's about fifty years old now.