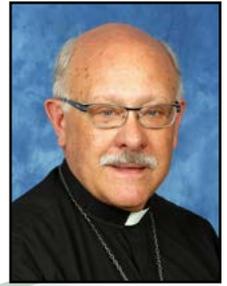




Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Third Sunday of Advent

December 16, 2018

Expect the Unexpected

Luke 3:7-18

We have been about the work of waiting for three weeks; in the season called "Advent," which means "coming." As in, Jesus is coming soon.

Parallel to our sacred time, the chronological time of the culture has been retailing us on a daily basis--from Black Friday to the inevitable question "How many "shopping days until Christmas?"

Time flies, we hear, and even as we are all marking time to 2019, the year of our Lord.

How is it going for you? In the midst of everything that bombards us with the news cycle, our life cycle, and life's interruptions are your lists accomplished? Sharing a sense of serenity amidst the urgency of lifelines and deadlines? Expecting things to change?

I have been thinking about John, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth; two old crocks, and a newborn. Talk about a turn of events, and how did they respond as they expected the unexpected?

In the aftermath of two unexpected births, how must it have been as John heard the call of God in the wilderness? And how was it when he responded with a turn around message to crowds to show up for "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins?"

His message was pretty abrupt: "You brood of vipers." Not very welcoming! "Who warned you?" Not very enfolding. But, they came.

Time was ripe...needs were touched...the sense that there was a need for a time of new beginnings. And in true catechetical style, they asked "What does this mean? What must we do?" And the response was let your actions be the fruit of the change that God is bringing about in your lives? Walk that talk, be the change, let your lives speak and be the truth of the One who is coming soon!

You see, the good news is that the Holy Spirit seeks to enflame each person with newness of purpose in life. All of which will, must, reflect the One who comes in the name of the Lord.

Three candles lit this Lord's Day. A progression in our lives which draws us closer in sharing the promise that God is breaking into our world anew right now!

Expectations are pretty high when darkness seems to permeate much our world. No need to make that list, but only to say that there is a preponderance of fear, that builds anxiety and doubt, that God has somehow taken a heavenly siesta. How often, at the end of the day, when prayer time comes, do

you, do I, do we say "God, where are you?" And I often sense the response of our gracious God is that I am here with you, through you, among you in the middle of your days. Even, now, brand new in Advent!

We can all make the lists of needs: the homeless, the hungry, the migrants, the war torn, the culture of the dozens of appeals we hear through every form of media. I have heard the story of "matching funds" in every 'charity' I support. Rather, I would hold that the "give more" appeal is fulfilled because we have been given to much! Blessed, I hear, to be a blessing.

For me, it must not be one more appeal, but the approach of responding to the GIFT that God has given us in Jesus. That GIFT that calls, commands, directs us to a response of giving our lives in witness and in care for the sake of the world. That all might know God's love through our love in managing all that we have received from God.

I have been thinking about John the Baptist consistently pointing to Jesus, towards the way of redemption and new life that builds up the Body of Christ in the world.

John gave his all; Jesus gave His all that we might give the gift away---share a coat, give some food, do not rob others and be satisfied!

Speak the truth, act on behalf of others, pray often, give freely, invite others in and be a rejoicing and gentle people whose "YES" is yes and whose "NO" is no! (Walking and talking faithfully within the peace of God!

And to guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus!

It is the Advent Call to be changed! Boldly! As if, we are brand new because we are in Christ!

John the Baptist if a misnomer. So many icons, painting do not show him baptizing Jesus. One of my favorites portrays him holding Scripture and points to Christ on the Cross. (He must increase; I must decrease.)

In so many ways, he is not John the Baptist, Johannes the Dipper, but "John the Points of the Way!"

It is so for us today, in our world, through our mission and witness in the daily lives we live in Christ.

What Child is this? What are we received each new day, but God's great gift, to expect the gift which is unexpected. This child born of Mary!

I am waiting! Are you? To receive Jesus in whom all things are being made new.

Soon, very soon, we will sing it:

"Then let us, with the Spirit's daring, step from the past and leave behind our disappointment, guilt and grieving; seeking new paths, and sure to find...our God is making all things new."

And we walk, waiting for the Lord, and knowing that He is here in this place through the love and the peace which passes all human understanding.

So, we wait! Amen.