

Tuesday – December 16 2014

Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, sent priest and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely. "I am not the Messiah." They asked him, "Then who are you?" "Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" John 1:19-22 NIV

It is a very uncomfortable feeling when you are being questioned. When I read this passage I am always reminded of the recurring scene of interrogation, of suspected criminals that I have seen on television. The suspect is put in a small room and grilled for hours and hours, without a break. The room is hot and uncomfortable. The suspect goes without food or water. In such situations the idea is to put on the pressure until the suspect gives in, out of exhaustion.

This passage of scripture gives no indication of how long John the Baptist was questioned. Nor is there any indication of what he was thinking. The questions seemed pretty straight forward and so were John's answers. This passage of scripture makes me wonder how and if I would be able to stand up to such interrogation. If you do not know who you are in Christ, you could easily buckle.

We are not living in a time or place where Christians are under such constant interrogation. Nor are we living under such oppression that you could be killed and punished for your Christian beliefs. However, the questioning, testing, and trials are still there. They just look different and are not as visible. Others who are not believers trap you or taunt and entice you. They are joy stealers. They can suck the joy of Christian life right out of you. We must guard our hearts against these situations in our lives that threaten to rob us of our joy.

We need the joy that advent brings. It is a time to renew our strength and renew our faith in God. It is also a

time to remind us that God will be with us in our days of trial.

God of Joy,

We thank you for your continued love and blessing. We thank you for standing by us in the moment of truth when others question us. You give us the courage to stand.

Joyously,

Amen

Wednesday – December 17 2014

Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people both now and forevermore. Psalm 125 1-2 NIV

As most of us have observed, when someone has real passion for something they never seem to grow tired of working at it. Runners, in training for a marathon, will run regardless of the weather. They invest in the best running shoe. They run every day. They push themselves to train, even when they are tired. They make sure to put time for running on their schedules. They build their schedules around running. Anyone

who truly knows them has no doubt what their passion is.

What if we lived out our faith in the same way? What would that faith look like? I think it would look similar. It would not matter what the weather was or what season. You would push yourself to live according to your faith, beliefs, and values. In fact, you would build your schedule around your faith-building activities. You would reserve time in your schedule. Anyone who truly knew you would have no doubt what your passion is.

It would not feel like work. Unshakable faith does not happen overnight. If it is something you desire, you must work on it. It is a lifetime investment. You have to also allow that faith to work on you and within you. The starting place is wherever you are right now. Where we are might require our taking baby steps toward our goal, but it is a start.

LORD,

We thank you for your continued patience as we develop in the faith. Your loving presence, as we continue on our faith walk, gives us comfort and reassurance.

Lovingly,

Amen



Thursday – December 18 2014

*Every house is built by someone,
but God is the builder of everything.
Hebrew 3:4*

As newly married couples establish a home they focus on many things. They talk about their budget and the things that they want in a home. They decide together on things such as the neighborhoods they want to live in, type or style of home, the number of rooms, and more.

While all these things are important, the amount of importance placed on these things may outweigh the benefits that they actually receive. As they make their decisions, most couples forget to include God. The priorities of society have led many couples away from their Christian values and beliefs. The enticement of having a beautiful wedding and home are too often the prevailing focus.

In many ways, this is very similar to the commercialization of Christmas. As Christians we must always be aware of this element in all the areas of our life, not just at Christmas. We should actively (and sometimes aggressively) address commercializing that threatens to order our lives.

Advent provides us with an opportunity to “clean house” and clear our minds. It helps us to be prepared to receive the baby Jesus once again and be renewed.

Lord,

We give you praise, for you always know just what we need and when we need it. We thank you Lord, for your patience and understanding when we go astray. We are thankful that you receive us with open arms, to bring us back into the fold.

In Christ,

Amen

Friday– December 19 2014

*And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says,
“Let all God’s angels worship him.”
Hebrew 1:6*



Everyone looks forward to the birth of a new baby. The time of waiting for the new birth fills us with hope. We look forward to the anticipated arrival of new life. There is something about having life in the home that seems to change everything. Everyone wants to come and see the new baby. Everyone wants to hold the new baby. Family members come around who have gone astray and estranged been from each other.

A new baby brings family and friends together. There is more laughter and fewer arguments. People become more generous. It is noteworthy that we are also more often more cooperative and tolerant of each other’s differences.

As we prepare to once again receive the Christ child, we look forward with hopeful expectation. Even though we know that this anticipated birth is just a reenactment, it elicits the same level of excitement. Symbolic or real, a baby changes everything. This is not just any baby. This is “the baby that changes everything.”

Loving God,

We are grateful for each opportunity to receive new life. We are grateful that you remind us to prepare our hearts and minds once again to experience the blessings of Advent.

Lovingly Awaiting,

Amen

Saturday – December 20 2014

The flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with faces to the ground. When the angel of the Lord did no show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the Lord. “We are doomed to die!!” he said to his wife. “We have seen God!” Judges 13:20-22.

Sometimes we find ourselves in situations that, by our own interpretation, look pretty bleak. We do not see a way out. In Manoah’s eyes he and his wife had done a bad thing. In his day and time it was an ultimate sin to see the Lord. This kind of sin was unforgiveable. Manoah and his wife had taken a young goat as an offering and sacrificed to the Lord. They were anticipating the blessing of having a child. According to scripture Manoah’s wife was barren.

When we look with our human eyes at situations, we see limitations and obstacles. We have doubts and questions about any possibility of a favorable outcome. We have conditioned ourselves to accept and live within the limitations of what we know and understand.

God has a way of making the impossible, possible. God can take any situation and turn it around. When we find ourselves in situations that we cannot understand or explain, we must learn to let go and let



Monday– December 22, 2014

Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all people. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. Psalm 96 2-4. NIV

Years ago my husband and I joined a choir at church. A verse in one of my favorite songs repeated “God has done marvelous things, praise the Lord.” As I sang this song, my mood was always joyful. I do not think I could sing this song if I was not able to look back over my life and see some of God’s blessings in my life.

The experience of the choir helped me to understand the scriptural references of many of the songs we sing in church. It also helped me to gain a deeper appreciation of the scriptures.

That experience became even more magnified as I sang in the Cleveland Messiah Chorus. I used to wonder what all the excitement was about when Handel’s Messiah was performed. Now that I have experienced it first hand, I count it a blessing to hear it or sing in it. The rush of people who want to join in when it is time to sing the Hallelujah Chorus adds to the excitement. The sound is powerful. Hallelujah, what a wonderful way to engage in the season of Advent.

God handle it. Although Manoah’s wife was barren, through God’s intervention they were blessed with a child.

Most Loving God,

Help us to let go when we need to, so that we can receive all the blessings you have predestine for us.

By Your Power,

Amen

Sunday– December 21, 2014

My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name. Luke 1:46b-49.

Many of the elders in my life have often said that “God works in mysterious ways.” Truly it has to be a mystery when a woman, who claims to be a virgin, turns up pregnant! It is even more mysterious to hear her singing praises to God and calling herself blessed!

As a child I was taught that there were certain things that you did not question. Things found in the Bible were high on the list. Even in this day, this passage continues

to remain somewhat of a mystery. Even as I write this passage, I look over my shoulder. I can feel my elders breathing down my neck in disapproval. Do not speak it, do not think it and definitely do not write it down.

As an adult I have come to learn that my God does not buckle or back down to what people think. God has a plan and reason for everything. God is always in control! If Mary were living in my childhood days, she would have been shunned by society. No man would have stepped forward to rescue her in marriage. As no man (in those days) would want to give their name to another man’s child.

Mary was still very young. When would she have learned to speak with such depth and presence of mind about the Lord’s goodness? She was carrying within her not just a baby. She was correct, all generations would call her blessed. She was not just carrying a baby. She was carrying the baby that would change everything.

Almighty God,

You lovingly care for us and bless us in ways that we cannot understand. It is because of your unwavering love that we are blessed.

In Appreciation,

Amen.

God of Love,

You find ways to demonstrate your love and accept us. Thank you Lord, for the opportunity to praise and celebrate you in song.

In Praise,

Amen

Tuesday– December 23, 2014

Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. Psalm 96, 7-9 NIV

When a friend was ordained, I was blessed with the opportunity to read this passage of scripture at the beginning of the ordination. At the end of the reading, the choir was joined by those in attendance with a highly spirited song based on this scripture.

The sanctuary was on fire. The spirit of the Lord was truly in the place. By the time the song was over, no one could sit down. It was truly a stirring experience and a real blessing. The place was bursting with love as we honored the person being ordained and praised God.

Have you ever had an experience in which you palpably felt the presence of God? God is always demonstrating unconditional love toward us. When you feel God's presence, just take a moment and thank God. It does not have to be in response to an earthshaking act of love. It may just be a small blessing. Let the world know, "hey, God has just blessed me."

Thank You LORD,

Thank You LORD. Thank You LORD. I just want to Thank You LORD.

Amen

Wednesday– December 24, 2014

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven... Ecclesiastes 3:1

One translation of the word "Ecclesiastes" is "the preacher." The words of this book read as if a preacher is offering a series of sermons. Many present day sermons are influenced by the wisdom of this ancient preacher, traditionally believed to be Solomon. It may be that, among all the wise sayings and guidance attributed to Solomon, this is the most profound.

The message of Ecclesiastes 3 is that creation has anticipated all that will occur in human history. Everything that we will do or experience is accounted for, from throwing stones to suffering death; the full range of experiences is accounted for. No list can be fully exhaustive, but the parameters are described as infinite by such component themes as "war, laughter, planting, and dancing."

God has made an appointment for every event and set this occasion in an eternal datebook.

The standing appointment for celebrating new life has come. It is not a singular appointment. We can never embrace or understand the greatest gift possible in one shot. Even with the annual revisiting of the manger scene, we can only catch a glimpse of the meaning. The time has come for us to gaze deeply into the heart of God. When we do, we will see a picture that includes this baby, caring for each of us.

God of Order,

We are blessed because you have forseen all that matters. We will never experience anything that you are ill prepared for. In Christ, we can be prepared for all that comes our way. Tonight, we look with anticipation toward the rebirth of Christ into our lives and our world.

In Him,

Amen

**Wednesday– December 24,
Nativity of the Lord I**

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; you have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. Isaiah 9:2-3

We have come a long way. We are like the runner who has trained for the big race. It's time now to run the last mile of the race. We have weighed-in, trained every day and eaten nutritious (spiritual) meals. We see the finish line ahead.

This was and never will be an ordinary race. It is not really a race anyway. It is a journey. We are only ready to cross the finish line when we (as believers) can cross together. We began this journey together and we will finish together. We will cross over together and celebrate together.

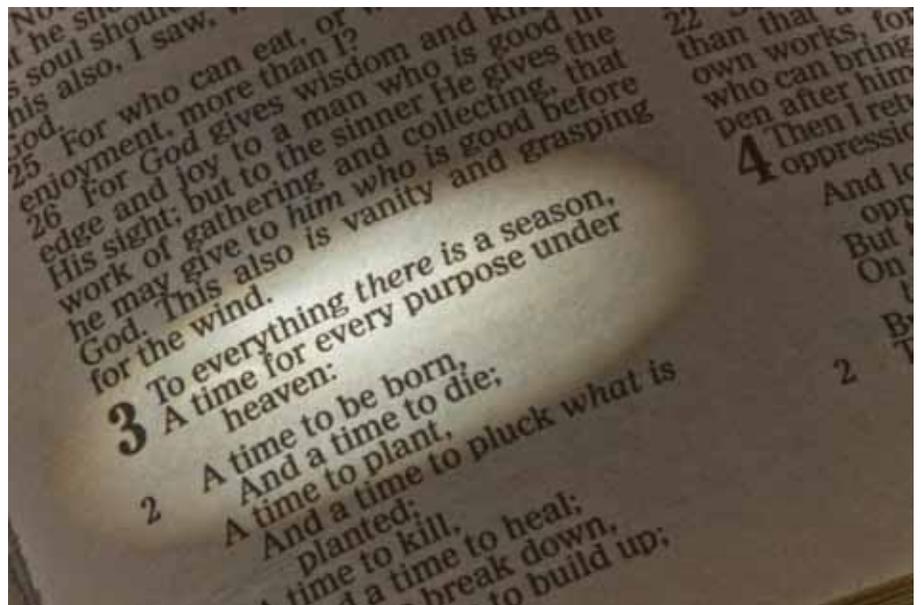
The line that we are preparing to cross has been regarded as our finish line. It is really not a finish line. It is a line to another new beginning. Tonight when the clock strikes midnight, we will usher in the new morning. In the distance we will hear the angels singing; "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given....and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting father, the prince of peace..."

Lord of All Time,

Let us receive the baby that changed everything.

Thank you Lord,

*Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen,
Amen, Amen, Amen.*





**Thursday– December 25, 2014
Christmas Day
Nativity of the Lord II**

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy to all people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” Luke 2:10-11

I like to believe that scripture speaks to me, even though every word of the Bible is written thousands of years before my arrival. This is not to say that it is speaking to me instead of those who were actually involved in the narratives. I believe that there are present day learnings available from the lessons of every generation. This text has much to say to all of us on this Christmas Day.

We are not to be afraid. Our fears are not those of the shepherds in Luke, but we are assured that we need not fear. There are economic problems in the land, but we should not fear. Troops are at risk in multiple places each year, but we should not fear. The politics of the nation are historically divisive, but fear should not be our response. A mature understanding of the admonition against fear may be to know that harm does befall each of us at times, but fear will not offer relief.

Relief is available from the message of “good news of great joy to all people.” God has good news for every

person. No matter what is happening in the cultures of the world, God is still in love with us. God’s love is not passive. It is active and effectual. It leads us to good places and teaches us good things. We are beneficiaries of the greatest possible source of power.

To each of us , a Savior is born this day. In every city and in rural places, a Savior is born. Jesus does not come to us as a baby this day. The fullness of his power and capacity is brought to bear in every situation in which we allow ourselves to embrace Christ with new faith and with new hope.

Lord of Lords,

We praise you and glorify you for the newness that Jesus brings, again and again. On this day, there is nothing more to ask of you. All that we have been offered calls forth profound gratitude. Thank you, Lord.

Now and Always,

Amen

**Thursday– December 25, 2014
Christmas Day
Nativity of the Lord III**

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Psalm 98:4

Most of us are quick to embrace most of the language of verse 4 of Psalm 98. We are eager to make joyful noise. We can often be heard breaking into joyous songs or singing praises. We struggle with “all the earth.” Even in this very psalm, images of God’s victory tempts us to imagine or assign who this victory is to be “over”. We are not comfortable with envisioning success which does not vanquish anyone. God certainly intends to be victorious, but not over the family on the corner of your block. All of creation is welcome to God’s victory, even those that you or I would exclude.

The psalmist paints a picture for us, so that we can begin to understand who and what are included in “all the earth.” We are invited to employ the lyre and the sound of melody. Trumpets and horns are played, while the sea and all of its contents roar. This must be pleasing, for the floods begin to clap their hands. All of these things lead to the hills offering a song of joy. This all constitutes a good expression of “all”, but not until we can get humanity to join in this celebration.

The psalm began with the words “O sing to the Lord a new song...” All of God’s creation is prepared to jointly “make a joyful noise.” To show us the way, Jesus has come into our world. He is not content to sing a new song by himself. The psalmist is talking to each of us. We have not assembled as “all the earth” until each of us is present and welcoming the presence of one another.

Lord of All,

We pray that we may learn to embrace all of those who you embrace. Show us how to achieve victory over conditions and behaviors, but not over your people. Your victory is constructive. Allow us to share in it.

In the Name of Jesus,

Amen



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