

From The Pastor

Pondering is the stance of the Advent season. Given the pace of life and all that can take our immediate attention, pondering is not, generally, a regular activity. Yet, to realize the action of God that is proclaimed in this season of faith, we must challenge ourselves to attend to the mysteries that give meaning and fulfillment to all that we are. Why do the words and themes of this season year after year still stir in our hearts?

There are two reasons. The words and themes speak to us because they are the truth and action of God on our behalf. When truth is heard, power is felt and it comes with a call. The power is the promise and action of God on our behalf that gives hope to every age and time. As people of faith, we look to God for rescue and hope in times of trial and despair. It is the human way for those who are humble and honest enough to admit that however secure we might seem to be, there remains an ultimate dependence on the presence and action of God.

This is the second reason. We are creatures in the hand of our Creator. Dependent and vulnerable both in the ways of the world, and in our spiritual need for divine mercy, the words and themes of the season reminds us that God is here to save us. Forgetting this truth is easy. Pondering the ways and the actions of God recalls us to our foundation and hope in Him.

Isaiah was obviously one who pondered the ways of God. So deeply did this man of faith listen to the Lord that he felt confident to speak what he heard for the comfort and peace of others. Historically, it was a time of exile. Isaiah proclaims a powerful word of hope and liberation to a people who feel the physical burdens of exile, as well as the spiritual rejection and absence of God. The liberation proclaimed was to lift the burdens of the body and the soul. "Comfort, give comfort to my people says the Lord...her service is at an end...her guilt is all forgiven".

How might these words be expressed in today's circumstance? Today the prophetic word might sound like this, 'Comfort and justice to my people says the Lord. Let their homes lost to foreclosure be restored to them, and let those who steal through fraud and injustice be put to shame. The sins of my people I forgive, and the blessings of my abundance shall be theirs'.

Would that not be a word of hope and justification for today? The hope and promise of Advent calls for our pondering lest we think God no longer hears our plea. The time\generation is different, but the weariness and cry of the people remain. God hears his own, and will always be faithful.

John the Baptist is the last of the Old Testament prophets. Like Isaiah, John is a man accustomed to pondering. His clothes and his food tell us he is a spiritual man. Raw clothes imply a readiness and hunger to hear God. Wild, raw food implies that John knows an inner nourishment beyond the body. As one who ponders the ways of God, John knows who he is, and who he isn't. He doesn't try to upstage the One he came to proclaim. He is, in effect, the beginning that begins the beginning that has no end.

Ponder the introduction to today's gospel: 'The beginning of the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. Each word is power, promise, and hope. 'Beginning', 'Good News', 'Jesus', 'Christ', 'Son of God'. It proclaims an incredible story that is hardly believable, and one that is often rejected. Yet, for those with the faith to trust its truth, it is the beginning of a mystery that has no end. It is a story that demands pondering.

How might we be like those from the Judean countryside who went to hear John the Baptist? They lived in a weary and weighted time that was harsh. Harsh times can make people hard. They can forget their manners and the better ways of treating people, preferring distance and coldness. Yet, just under the surface, they know it shouldn't be this way. An uneasy tension settles over them that only serves to deepen the weariness of hard times.

Any word from a man of God who offers forgiveness and a new beginning is as refreshing as a cancelled debt. As in the time of John the Baptist, people are looking for hope and a word from God that all will be well. That word has been spoken, and his name is Jesus. His mission is 'Christ', the Messiah, and his identity is the 'Son of God'. He is a new beginning for all who believe, and the baptism he offers is one of the Spirit. This Spirit is the power of love that secures the heart with hope and strength in troubled times. It is a Spirit that calls for compassion when we might prefer to be distant and uninvolved. It is a Spirit that cancels the debt of sin and restores the heart where it belongs: in the hands of God.

Ponder the words and the images and actions of God and his prophets this season. They are not without their message and hope for our time. Jesus is the action of God that is active and effective in our time. Find hope and rest in Him, seeking the power of the Spirit that confirms his presence.

Thank you for saying 'yes' to the Christmas baskets. Please bring your food gifts to the altar. Thank you to all who are supporting the Giving Tree.

Father John Esper