

Sunday Dec. 17, 2017
Good Samaritan Anglican Church
Advent 3

Please pray with me. Lord, help us to
repent turn ourselves to you and to
prepare our hearts for your coming again.
Help us also to rejoice in your great gift of
life, love, and presence in our lives. Amen

So we are past the halfway mark till
Christmas. This season of Advent is flying
by and next time we gather it will be for
Advent 4 and Christmas Eve. Our time is

truly clipping by and yet we still have time
to rest into the beautiful season of Advent.

I love Advent and the waiting and
anticipating for the coming of Christ.

Despite of my love for contemplating and
remaining still I can feel the crunch of
Christmas coming. In other words the
panic of getting everything done is setting
in. Company is coming, we are finishing a
house project, finishing up presents, and

planning for the services at church.

Despite all the craziness of our lives we are welcomed into the story of redemption and joy today. We are invited to come and sit for awhile.

The third Sunday of Advent is called Gaudete Sunday, which means rejoice in latin. Most of Advent is supposed to be more penitential and preparedness oriented. We are supposed to examine our lives and to see where things need to be set right before God. Today is supposed to

be a respite from this season and a focus on the joy that comes from Jesus being in the world. As we hear in our Psalm today, "Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves." Gaudete Sunday is about rejoicing and proclaiming the good to come in Christ Jesus.

The Gospel passage today brings us to the life and ministry of John the Baptist. He is the forerunner before Jesus and has a very important role in the coming of the

kingdom. The forerunner in biblical times was a person who would run long distances as fast as they could in order to announce the impending arrival of someone great.

Imagine a frantic marathon runner. Their job was to be an announcer so the people could prepare and put on a good show of hospitality for the important dignitary.

John has acquired a following of people who are becoming like him, showing others a new way to live. John is pointing to the coming Messiah. He encourages them to repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

John knows the only way to prepare for the coming Messiah is to realize that you have sinned and are separated from God. Repenting and turning away from sin puts your heart in a humble place to receive Jesus. He only needs a small

opening in our hearts in order to change us and to show us His love. John's job was to get the people ready for the Messiah. John offers so much to us today.

So Jesus and his disciples are going out into the Judean countryside to baptize people. They have gone to an area plentiful with water. Aenon and Salim were two towns very close to the Jordan River a little more than half-way between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. They

are areas that would have been easy to travel from one to another.

This is how the disciples of John have heard about Jesus' ministry. People would have brought news of anything important such as a man healing and baptizing.

John's disciples were not pleased to hear of another doing as they were.

John's followers are so much like the people now. They have a niche and do not want anyone else to get in on their work.

They feel threatened to hear that another

person has been doing the same thing as them. What if this affects their ministry?

If you are running a business today there is much discussion about having a platform and making sure it is distinct from others. You are supposed to hone your message, keeping it clear and well articulated. Your platform or business is supposed to stand out from others.

John's message of repentance was completely different from anything else being taught. The actual person mattered

and what they did with their heart mattered. This was revolutionary because until this point religion was about what was done to a person. If you were born a Jew then you went to temple and had priests perform ceremonies on your behalf.

If you were born Roman then you had the pagan temple gods involved in your life. And if you had a following you were supposed to do everything you could to protect your group. The Jews were fierce about protecting their faith all

throughout scriptures you hear Jesus dialoguing with the Jewish officials.

Sometimes in the world we too try to protect our own position or place of influence. We want to hold onto the things that we do and the people we share life with.

As much as I love being a mother my place of influence and work will not last forever. As the kids grow and become adults there need for Chris and I will change, as it should. The hope and goal of

my job as a mother is to turn their hearts to God and to let Him tell them what to do with their lives. It would be tempting to hang on to the position of influence in their lives longer than I should.

Telling them how to be an adult, how to parent, and how to do things just as I want them to. The question though is would it be glorifying to God to live this way? God wants us to live lives that reflect his nature and goodness.

Where in your own life are you afraid to have others do the things that you do? One of my mentors told me once that you should always be looking around you for another person to do what you do.

Always looking for someone to replace you. Having this mindset keeps us grounded and reminds us of our lives before God. What a humbling and hard statement and yet so true to what we hear today.

Chris and I are watching the Crown right now and there was a part in an episode where the private secretary to Duke Philip was discussing Queen Elizabeth's coldness and lack of affection towards her son Prince George.

He goes on to speculate the reason for this distance was a presumed realization of Queen Elizabeth's death and eventual loss of the throne. He said Prince George was a continual reminder of her loss of power. His estimation of the

situation is that Queen Elizabeth was threatened by Prince George because he would always replace her. It is easy to want to protect our status or position in a place.

In the world we are constantly told to fight to get to the top and do whatever it takes to stay there. Our message today from John couldn't be further from this, his response to his followers was totally for us today. John says, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven." John

points to the life and ministry of Jesus and says he can not do this without the help of God and if God is blessing Him then it must be good.

John allows his followers to look to another, he acknowledges his end and another's beginning. Each of us in this life will have a beginning in a ministry or place of influence and an end.

It is in how we manage those moments that matter. Do we cling onto them and refuse to let go? Do we cling

onto a sense of identity rather than the one who made us? Do we refuse to let others move on in their affections or to listen to another?

John realizes that his life and work has an ending and it is alright. Our lives have beginnings and endings as well and we are invited to embrace what God has for us not clinging to our own ideas of identity.

One of the greatest gifts of being at a seminary is watching so many people take on transitions. Some of the most inspiring ones are those of people who are honest of their fear and trepidation of the what's to come.

They willingly trust God's will and goodness for their life and are honest when things are not what they thought. It's okay to not understand a new phase of life and to be a bit distraught.

John then takes us a bit further in that he admits, “I am not the Christ, but am sent ahead of him.” He is not the Messiah and he knows it. When I was in seminary one of our professors gave us an assignment to write 100 times, “I am not a savior, but I know the one who is.”

She wanted us to have it drilled into our minds that ministry did not begin and end in us but rather in Jesus. We like John are called to point to the one who is truly the Christ and Savior of the world. It is

important to for us to remember who we are and to whom we belong. John was content with a lesser role and we too should be content with the role of one who points the way.

He then takes his role and likens to that of the bridegroom’s “friend” at a wedding. Among the friends of the bride and groom (in Judea, at least), two had a position of trust regarding them and had to watch over the intimate relations of the young couple; they led the bride to the

groom and kept watch outside the bridal chamber. The “voice of the bridegroom” is thought to be “the triumph shout by which the bridegroom announced to his friends outside the joy he finds in his wife.”

The picture indicates John’s selfless joy in learning of the people of God flocking to Jesus (v 26). While no allegory is in mind, the Evangelist and his readers would have been conscious of the use of the picture in the OT for Israel as the bride of God (Isa 62:4–5; Hos 2:14–20) and in

the NT of the Church as the bride of Christ. John was directing his followers to the scriptures and to imploring them to take on the mind of God found in His word.

We too need to be directed to lean upon God’s word and to fill our minds with the things of Him so that we have right thinking. How can we possibly be expected to turn from the world’s way of success and promoting of ourselves to the selflessness of the Gospels.

John implores us today in his famous and powerful words, “He must become greater; I must become less.”

The Christian life is a life that becomes less focused on one’s self and more focused on the will of our Father in heaven.

John shows us a radical attitude of humility, being quick to see when the time has come for us to transition and doing so with grace. God has something wonderful for each and everyone one of us. All of these ministries or places of influence will

have beginnings and endings in which we are called to step into and remember that it is all about God and not ourselves.

When I was ordained a deacon my Bishop wrote in my Bible, “I am among you as one who serves.” Ever since then I have tried to remember this as a motto of my life. This is not just a message for those ordained but rather for all of us who call upon Jesus. Just like John the Baptist we too are called to serve others with joy remembering the gift it is to serve.

Proclaiming Jesus is not about glorifying ourselves but rather humbling serving the one who will come again. Advent is a season and a time to humble our hearts in deep joy for a chance to serve the living God.

The bible is all about taking the world's ideas and spinning them on their heads. When we are weak He is strong. He must become greater and I must become less. Jesus' ways are good, holy, pure, and trustworthy. Becoming less

doesn't mean becoming a shell of a person but rather remembering our humble place in this world and his great goodness to allow us to partake in the coming of the kingdom.

So may you grasp onto the humble message of John today in the midst of busyness, time crunches, and the world's cry to promote yourself. May you hear, mark, and inwardly digest the message of John today to become less so that He can become more in your life. And may you

experience sheer joy at the coming of the

baby in the manger. To God be glory now
and forever. Amen.