

Dec.16, 2007

MZSL

Advent 3

Isaiah 35:1-10

James 5:7-10

Matt.11:2-11

Let us pray...

A popular department store was having an early bird Christmas sale and everything was ½ price for the first two hours of the opening. A mob of people crowded around the entrance and a small man tried to push his way through the crowd only to be pushed back. On the man's second attempt, a lady's purse wacked him square in the face. On his third attempt to push through the mob, a large woman knocked him to the ground and said, "No cutting, mister!" With that, the little man mustered up a gigantic size shout, held up a ring of keys and yelled, "If anybody else pushes, hits, or knocks me down again, I won't be opening the store!"

Although Christmas can bring out the giving spirit in people, it can also bring out the worst in people. Some prepare for the day of Hosanna with weeks of "Humbugs". And as the silent, holy night closes near, we begin to remember those loved ones who won't be with us this year.

Good friends and close family who have died or moved far away. Holidays can be as difficult for some as they are joyous for others. As joyous as God intended this sacred time to be, life presents as many reasons to shout "Humbug" at this time of year instead of "Hosanna"! No matter how many carols are piped into our ears; no matter how many sermons are preached; no matter how many uplifting worship services we attend, we can find ourselves having a "humbug", burned out spirit at Christmas time.

John the Baptist faced the same bitter-sweetness in our Gospel lesson today. He came out of the wilderness prophesying the coming of the Lord, and the next minute, he found himself in prison.

But our Gospel lesson today tells us that John did not let his circumstances shape his outlook on life. He did not allow his physical imprisonment to imprison his spirit. The question he sent through his disciples was not, "What will become of me?" Instead, he asked, "Are you the One? Or should we wait for another?" Jesus answered, "Go and tell John; the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and Good News is given to the poor."

In last week's scripture, John the Baptist was the voice in the wilderness prophesying the coming of Jesus. Today, Jesus' voice affirms John. When Jesus sent word that the blind see and the deaf hear, He was assuring John that He **WAS** the one that Isaiah prophesied would come. John could have been more concerned about his immediate plight. But he knew there was something far more important than his life: the coming of the awaited Messiah.

Once John knew with certainty he had prophesied rightly the coming of Christ, it no longer mattered what happened to him. God's purpose for his life was being fulfilled. This is how and why he was able to not allow his circumstances to shape his outlook on life. By knowing that he was doing the job he was called to do, the outside forces that worked against him had no power to harm his spirit.

I often think about Martin Luther King, Jr's great "I Have a Dream" speech where he says, "It doesn't matter what happens to me now, because I have looked over the mountain top and seen the promised land." But those of us who do not have such a place in history still have an important purpose. -3-

Are you fulfilling the purpose God has for your life? We might enjoy certain hobbies. We might be skilled at certain activities. We might get a lot of praise for accomplishments at work. Yet you might not find fulfillment of purpose in any of these things. True satisfaction comes from knowing you are fulfilling God's plan and purpose for your life.

Instead, you might find your purpose by raising your kids in the ways and admonition of the Lord. You might invite a lost heart to know Christ. You can share your faith in word and deed. In many lines of work, no one gives a bonus or a plaque or a medal. Yet, being a devoted wife and mother is the most satisfying of all vocations ...because it fulfills God's purpose for your life. Likewise, grand-parenting, teaching, nurturing and shepherding and all kinds of things go unnoticed and unawarded...except by God.

God's purpose for your life isn't about what you do...but how you do it and whose lives are touched while you are going about the business of daily life.

There's a story of a major league pitcher who broke his arm a week before he was to be the starting pitcher for the All-star game. He was so distraught about the lost opportunity that he considered...-4-

jumping out of a window of his 5 story Manhattan townhouse. When he looked out his window, he saw a homeless man in rags with both arms broken and in a double sling. The homeless man was jumping and spinning in circles, whooping and hollering. The big league pitcher began to think how selfish he was to let his spirit be so negative considering all his blessings. He went down to thank the man and said, "I've been upstairs in my townhouse thinking about ending it all and here you are with two broken arms on the streets and you're dancing with joy. What's your deal, mister?" The homeless man replied, "Gee, dude. I wasn't dancing for joy. But as long as you're here now, could you scratch my nose?"

By scratching the nose of another person, I dare say he fulfilled God's purpose more than if he had been able to pitch in the All-star game.

In today's Gospel, John asks the question, "Are you the one or should we look for another?" At the same time, we are asking a related question, "Jesus, am I fulfilling your purpose for my life or am focused too much on the business of life?" Christmas and faith will mean so much more if we value and acknowledge God's true purpose for our life. -5-

John the Baptist comes to tell us that our outlook on life need not be determined by our circumstances. Christmas is coming because Jesus is coming. God's purpose for us in this sacred event is to lower our "humbugs" and raise our "Hosannas"! And now, may His peace ...Amen