

## Third Sunday of Advent - Spirit of the Lord Is Upon Me

December 11, 2016

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD

Readings: Luke 4: 16-21; Isaiah 61: 1-11

The Reverend Craig Kocher was Assistant Dean of the Chapel and Director of Religious Life At Duke University when he went to Honduras with a group of Duke Students in the spring of 2004. At the end of a week of sleeping on cement floors with no electricity and running water and building a cinder block house in the hot sun during the day, they gathered for mass with the locals in the little church. When the priest blessed the body and blood of Christ and invited his people to come forward, they flocked towards him, all of them at once singing and dancing, hands outstretched. They approached the communion table as if someone were going to place a million dollars in their cupped hands, as if life itself was waiting for them at the front of the church.

Kocher told the priest afterwards how moved he was by the faith of his people, with the intensity and spirit in which they Holy Communion. "How do you do it at your church?" the priest asked.

"Well," Kocher said, "after we say the communion prayers, the ushers line them all up in single file rows and they shuffle down front patiently. Some of them sing." I added.

"Lines," the priest said. "You make them wait in lines for the bread of life!"

"I don't know that anybody *makes* them. It's just sort of how Protestants in America do it."

The old priest paused for a moment. "Some of these people don't know where their next meal will come from. Some of them don't know if their new born baby will live through the year. Some won't sleep under a roof tonight. Christ is their hope. We can live for many days without food and shelter, but we cannot live for a single moment without hope."<sup>1</sup>

Emily Dickinson wrote, "Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul - and sings the tunes without the words - and never stops at all." Hope. We cannot live a single moment without it. We began Advent with Daniel, thrown into a lion's den for kneeling in prayer and challenging injustice. The Lord saved and freed Daniel from the prison of and the hatred, jealousy and persecution of those who sought his death. When we find ourselves in lion's dens, we too can trust and hope in the Lord. Last week, we met a Hebrew community devastated by destructive locust. But "even then.... afterwards" the Lord proclaimed through Joel, the Spirit of the Lord would be poured upon them and the young and old, men and women, slave and free would have visions and dreams of God's steadfast presence and promised restoration. Whatever difficult or deadly swarms threaten us, we too can trust and hope in the Lord.

This week, Isaiah is speaking to a people who have been waiting to be released from exile and return to their homeland, Jerusalem and the Temple. But instead of a glorious homecoming, they find the city, the temple, the economy, their lives and communities crumbled and flattened. The Lord, through the prophet, addresses a congregation with those who are imprisoned and captive in affliction, brokenheartedness and grief — in other word, any average congregation. The Lord, through Isaiah, promises that what they see is not all that there is. “Isaiah speaks of a world beyond present arrangements, a world where there is good news, liberty, comfort, garlands instead of ashes... Isaiah’s words refuse to abide within the confines of the rationality of the dominate society, refuse to be limited by common sense, everyday experiences....the words of the prophet beckon us beyond the world of predictability into another world of thought and risk and gift, in which divine intervention — the pouring of the Holy Spirit ---- enables new life to break [in], to subvert our tamed expectations, and to evoke fresh faith.” This is the hope that we cannot live a moment without.”<sup>2</sup> The hope we find and receive from God is not just wishful or positive thinking. It’s a knowing that God’s love and faithfulness are real, sure and unfolding, no matter how it may feel or seem. The hope we hold on to and that holds us together is a faith that God is with us, God is at work and will bring good news, healing, liberty, comfort and an “earth more closely resembling that which God first had intended when God began forming nothing into something, less into more.”<sup>3</sup>

The promise that God’s love, just and mercy will rule gives us breaths of peace and joy this third Sunday in Advent. The hope we have because of the certainty of God’s grace and future makes us hungry for it now. Daniel, Joel and Isaiah lift us up like children too short to see over a wall or crowd. We’re standing on tiptoe, straining to see the dreams and visions, the ways and wonders of God. And if we let them enter our hearts and swirl around in our consciousness, we get hungry for God’s kingdom to come, God’s will be done sooner rather than later. When our wandering, hoping hearts follow these Advent prophets, we come to a manger, we come to a baptism at the Jordan River, we come to Jesus who will proclaim that God’s promises are being fulfilled in him, in our presence even though there is still darkness, struggles and brokenness. We are a people of hope. But not just for our own gratification or comfort. We are a people raised, wrapped and protected in hope so that we can be the people we are called to be because the Lord has poured out his Spirit upon us, too, and anointed us at our baptism, to proclaim and be good news to the oppressed,

brokenhearted, captives and those who mourn. No disrespect to Emily Dickinson, but the hope of God doesn't just remain a perched in our souls but poured out for others and the healing of the world.

Tony Campolo tells the story of being a guest preacher at a Pentecostal church. They got him to kneel down on his knees and six of them put their hands on his head and prayed for him asking the Holy Spirit to fill him up. "These men prayed long," he says, "and the longer they prayed, the harder they leaned on my head." One of the men prayed at length about a particular man named Charlie Stoltzfus. Campolo thought to himself, - "if you're going to lean on my head, the least that you can do is pray for me!" The man prayed on and on for this guy who was about to abandon his wife and three children. Campolo said he could still hear him calling out "Lord! Lord! Don't let that man leave his wife and children! Send an angel to bring that man back to his family. Don't let that family be destroyed! You know who I am talking about ... Charlie Stoltzfus. He lives down the road about half a mile on the right-hand side in a silver house trailer!"

Campolo thought to himself, with some degree of exasperation, - "God knows where he lives... What do you think God's doing, sitting up there in heaven saying give me that address again"?

Campolo got into his car and headed home. He saw a young man hitchhiking on the side of the road. He looked broken down and depressed. He picked him up. (I know you are not supposed to, but Tony Campolo is a Baptist preacher and I think whenever he can get someone locked in to where he can preach to him, he does it.) "Hi", said Campolo, "my name's Tony"

He said, "My names Charlie Stoltzfus...."!

So Campolo got off at the next exit and turned around and headed back. His passenger said, "Hey, mister! Where are you taking me?!"

Answer: "I'm taking you HOME!"

He said, "why?"

And Campolo said, "Because you just left your wife and three children RIGHT?"

He said "RIGHT! RIGHT!"

So Campolo drove onto a side road - Straight to his silver house trailer. When he pulled into the drive Charlie Stoltzfus looked at him with astonishment and said "How'd you know I lived here?"

Campolo said "God told me! Now you get into that house trailer because I want to talk to you and your wife. God can heal your broken hearts."

Charlie Stoltzfus is now a preacher in Pentecostal churches, but more importantly his broken family got put back together. Now, I have to tell you I've never experienced anything like that story in my life. But I have seen God put broken people and broken families back together."<sup>4</sup> I have met prisoners who are being freed for something more by the love of God. I have seen faithful people battle for the oppressed and feed those captive by hunger. I have been one of those captives, who was broken and grieving yet lived to find there was still more to life. The hope we have in the Lord, most perfectly revealed in Jesus is real, true and reliable, so we can rejoice... we can hold steady... we can still laugh amid tears... because the hope of the Lord will not disappoint. We may come to communion in lines and silence, but don't be fooled ---- When we come to the altar, you are receiving our Lord, the hope we cannot live a moment without. Amen.

Linda M Alessandri 12/9/16

## ENDNOTES

---

1. Craig T. Kocher, "Sermon for the Third Sunday in Advent, December 11, 2005 as posted on <http://chapel-archives.oit.duke.edu/documents/sermons/2005/051211.pdf>

2. William H. Willimon, "More" preached December 16, 1990 The Collected Sermons of William H. Willimon Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010 p 115

3. Willimon, p. 115

4. Compolo Story recounted by Andy Griffiths in "My Sermon for Sunday "(Isaiah 61 and Luke 4) 09/29/2010 posted <http://galleywood40.weebly.com/1/post/2010/09/heres-my-sermon-for-sunday-isaiah-61-and-luke-4.html>