

Pastor Troy E. Medlin
Advent 3, Year C
Grace, River Forest
12/15/2024

Good News in the Key of Your Life

As a part of the eastern orthodox liturgy there is often someone who chants throughout the service-- "let us attend." The phrase calls the gathered assembly to pay attention, look, listen, watch. The Lord is near. Close. At hand. Both here now and on the way. Brining life out of death and placing us in a spacious, new place. And that makes all the difference in the world.

I have a framed photo on my desk that sits next to my icon of Jesus as the stranger. A reminder that God's anointed one is always coming towards us. This particular photo has become an icon for me. An icon is a religious image that is meant to draw us to prayer or to act as a physical manifestation of that person in the liturgy.

It is a photo of the wide open prairie outside of Viscount, Saskatchewan. It is one of the places where the land and the sky seem to go on forever until they meet and become one. In those moments of curved inwardness, when I feel stuck, too busy to notice much at all, or when I'm tempted to believe that I have to compete for space or protect the little space I have, it is like Christ himself comes toward me through this icon to draw me out of myself just when I need it. That is what Christ always promises to do. The Lord is near- and as for St. Paul to the Philippians so for us- that makes all the difference in the world.

I have a friend who will often ask himself and others this question as a kind of spiritual practice. He first heard it from Barbara Brown Taylor. What or Who is God using to save your life right now? **What is saving you- today?** In other words, in what key is the good news being played this morning- so that it harmonizes with your own body? So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Scholars are not clear about when the part of Zephaniah that we hear today was written. Whether pre-exile or while they were in Babylon. It is good news regardless. Then and now. For anyone in any kind of exile. The exhausted. Or those the world makes to feel expendable. For the forgotten. Those oppressed within or without. For anyone whose body has betrayed you and does not work like it used to. If you've ever experienced shame. If you've ever been lost or like you didn't have a home- even inside a house. Or if your sin seems stretched too far. You know if this is good news for you:

“Rejoice, sing, take heart. The LORD is in your midst. The Lord will gather you and bring you home. He will rejoice over you with gladness; he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.” The Lord delights in you.

The words from John were heard as good news too. For those trapped in systems of destruction. Those who have experienced harm and violence at the hands of the powerful. Those trampled on and passed over. And others too. Brood of vipers. Wrath is coming. Axes taken to roots. Trees cut down and thrown into the fire. The old order of things will come to an end. The world as it is, is not all that there will be. The one who judges at last is the one whose own life will be cut down only to be raised up again. God’s judgement is God’s mercy. That judgement is trustworthy. Good news indeed.

For me, it is the recent birth of our godchild. A new baby born to our good friends. Seeing one of our new neighbors and his son from Venezuela continue to thrive as a part of the oak park community, enriching so many along the way. Words of forgiveness from someone I had hurt when I was feeling drained. Forgiveness is always a miracle, isn’t it?

And, our God who is, even now, busy bringing us the fulness of Jesus Christ, all of God’s very self as gift. In broken bread, broken bodies, on this broken earth. Christ’s flesh and blood in a perfusion of places. Always, in the tone and timbre of your heart. He is your savior after all.

The Lord is near- and as for St. Paul to the Philippians so for us- that makes all the difference in the world.

How about for you? How is God saving your life? Through your grandchildren who open up space in you that you didn’t know was there? The voice of someone who reminds you not to take yourself too seriously. The vulnerability of someone who gives you permission to tell the truth? Maybe your failure and weakness is saving you today- because that’s when grace can find its way into our hearts, cracking them open to create something new. Where has Christ made himself known through an icon of sorts?

Let us attend. Pay attention. Watch. Hear. Receive the good news- for you. All for the sake of others. That’s how the mystery of the gospel works. The crowds ask John, what then should we do, and he responds. Love your neighbors who are near. Share extra food and clothing with those who need it. Be content with what you have. Nothing complicated- open hands in a world of clenched fists. Living as Advent people amid so much hustle and hoarding. Christ is present. Yes- his day is just over the horizon. Rejoice in the Lord, and in his perlocutionary particularity. The Word does what it says- and always in the way and at the moment of your need. As St. Paul told the Philippians. That makes all the difference in the world.

