

SERMON – 12/10/00
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH WAUWATOSA
SECOND SUNDAY – ADVENT
11:00AM WORSHIP

TEXT: LUKE 3: 1-6
MALACHI 3:104
PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11

FOCUS: PREPARE FOR GOD IN THIS LIFE

“SEEING THE GOOD NEWS”

Let US Pray:

Spirit of wonder, Spirit of mystery,
may we softly, gently, sneak a peak at God’s sacred place in our lives
through the hearing of your most cherished scripture of ancient times.
Amen.

Read Luke 3:1-6

“All flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

WHAT AMAZING WORDS....

THE DEEPEST SENSE OF THESE WORDS IS THAT

PEACE, HARMONY, HEALTH, & HEALING

WILL BREAK OUT ALL OVER THE WORLD!

“ALL FLESH SHALL SEE....”

MEANS THAT EVERY SINGLE HUMAN BEING ON EARTH

WILL SEE THIS COME TO PASS.

SOUNDS IMPOSSIBLE, DOESN'T IT?

THIS PROMISE FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH,

---BROUGHT TO US IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

---COURTESY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

BRINGS TO MIND THE WORDS OF JESUS TO HIS DISCIPLES,___
RECORDED IN_(MATT 19:26)
“FOR MORTALS IT IS IMPOSSIBLE,
BUT FOR GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE”

TRY TO IMAGINE WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE:

****WAR IS JUST A MEMORY**

****HUNGER AND POVERTY A THING OF THE PAST**

****EVERY HUMAN BEING EXPERIENCES LOVE AND CARING COMMUNITY**

SOUNDS LIKE HEAVEN DOESN'T IT?

AND....WHEN YOU LOOK AT THE STATE OF HUMAN AFFAIRS THESE DAYS,
IT SOUNDS IMPOSSIBLE.....”FOR MORTALS.....

NEVERTHELESS, THIS IS A TIME OF YEAR FOR DREAMING.

MANY OF OUR CHILDREN ARE WRITING LISTS

OF ALL THE THINGS THAT WOULD FULFILL THEIR DREAMS.

ADMIT IT....THE CHILD WITHIN US

ALSO REACHES OUT FOR THE WONDER AND MYSTERY

OF THIS “SEASON OF GOOD CHEER.”

ONE FRIEND DESCRIBED HIS FEELINGS

ABOUT THE CHRISTMAS SEASON THIS WAY.....

“IT IS AS THOUGH WE TAKE LEAVE OF THE REAL WORLD FOR A TIME
AND WAIT FOR THAT WONDERFUL SOMETHING

THAT WILL COME TO US ALL

AND BRING PEACE AND JOY TO THE WORLD –

BUT IT NEVER QUITE ARRIVES

AND WE WAIT FOR ANOTHER YEAR TO DREAM AGAIN.”

IF SOMEHOW YOU WERE **ASSIGNED TO WRITE** A HEADLINE

FOR THE **MILWAUKEE JOURNAL/SENTINAL,**

THAT WOULD COME TRUE

...WHAT WOULD THAT HEADLINE BE?

WOULD IT BE THE KINDS OF HEADLINES

THAT FILL OUR NEWSPAPERS TODAY?

******* I WOULD IMAGINE NOT....**

DEEP WITHIN OUR HEARTS WE WANT GOOD NEWS

AND NOT BAD NEWS

LIFE IS FILLED WITH BAD NEWS.

**WOULDN'T IT BE A WONDERFUL TO SEE GOOD NEWS BREAK OUT
IN OUR NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS.**

I DID A LITTLE OF MY OWN DREAMING

AND I WROTE HEADLINES

THAT MIGHT APPEAR IN MY DREAM WORLD...

“PEACE DECLARED ALL OVER EARTH!”

‘HUNGER AND POVERTY TO BE ELIMINATED BY YEAR’S END!’

“NO REPORTS OF CHILD ABUSE IN THE USA FOR OVER A YEAR!”

“RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AT AN ALL TIME HIGH!”

“VACCINE FOR ALL FORMS OF CANCER DISCOVERED!”

“OFFICIALS TO INVESTIGATE ABSENCE OF VIOLENT CRIME!”

WONDERFUL DREAMS

BUT NOT VERY REALISTIC,

YOU MIGHT EVEN GO AS FAR AS SAYING....."IMPOSSIBLE!"

AND YOU WOULD BE RIGHT WITH SUCH THINKING.

HUMAN BEINGS ON THEIR OWN WILL NEVER BRING SUCH A THING ABOUT.

IN THE WORDS OF SCRIPTURE,

"FOR MORTALS IT IS IMPOSSIBLE"

AND YET, THERE IS A PROMISE

WHICH IS DEEP AT THE CENTER OF OUR FAITH

THAT POINTS TO A SPIRITUAL TRUTH

THAT LIES AT THE CENTER OF THIS SEASON

AND CALLS US TO BE READY FOR GOD TO INTERVINE

IN THE WORLD,

"BUT FOR GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE."

IN PLAIN TALK,

HERE IS THE MESSAGE JOHN THE BAPTIST

PROCLAIMED IN THE WILDERNESS OF JUDEA.

WE MAY HAVE ALL THOUGHT THE MESSAGE WAS AN ANCIENT ONE,

HOWEVER, IT SPEAKS QUITE DIRECTLY TO THE SPIRITUAL WILDERNESS

OF OUR CONTEMPORARY WORLD

- "MAKE ROOM FOR GOD!"
- * "GET RID OF EVERYTHING IN YOUR LIFE THAT IS A BARRIER TO GOD"
- "EVERY PERSON WILL SEE THE PROMISES OF GOD

COME TO PASS!"

THERE IS A NATURAL DIVISION OF THIS MESSAGE

INTO TWO AREAS OF CONCERN.

LET US RETURN TO THAT MATTHEW PASSAGE....

****FIRST OF ALL,

“THAT WHICH IS POSSIBLE FOR MORTALS...”

WHEN JOHN THE BAPTIST BROUGHT HIS MESSAGE TO THE
WILDERNESS,

HE SAID THERE WERE TWO THINGS WE NEED TO DO

IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

FIRSTWE NEED TO MAKE ROOM FOR GOD.

“PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.”

IT IS EASY TO FIND OUR LIVES SO CLUTTERED AND BUSY

THAT THERE IS NO ROOM FOR OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN OUR RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY

IS RATHER PERFUNCTORY.

THE HARD THING IS THAT

THOSE TIMES IN WHICH WE CELEBRATE

THE CENTRAL EVENTS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH
ARE PRECISELY THE TIMES

WHEN THE PACE OF OUR LIVES BECOMES MOST HECTIC.

THINK ABOUT IT.

---ARE YOU PREPARED FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON?

---ARE YOUR CARDS ALL WRITTEN,

----SHOPPING DONE

---AND PREPARATIONS FOR HOLIDAY COMPANY COMPLETED?

******* IN ALL OF THIS ---**

HAVE YOU MADE ROOM FOR GOD

IN THE CENTER OF YOUR LIFE

FOR THIS ADVENT SEASON?

IS GOD'S WAY INTO THE CENTER OF YOUR HEART

A STRAIGHT AND EASY PATH

OR IS THE WAY CLUTTERED AND WINDING?

**THE INTENT HEREIS NOT TO ADD MORE CLUTTER IN OUR
LIVES**

BY WAY OF FEELING GUILTY.

**(ALTHOUGHT, GUILT HAS GOTTEN A BAD NAME
AND THE FACT IS THAT THERE ARE TIMES
WHEN GUILT IS IN ORDER!)
HOWEVER PROPER RESPONSE TO JOHN'S MESSAGE
IS TO INTENTIONALLY ADDRESS A QUESTION
TO EVERY ASPECT OF OUR CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS THIS YEAR.
-----"HOW DOES GOD RELATE TO THIS?"**

AIM THE QUESTION AT

**OUR SHOPPING AND SPENDING,
OUR RELATIONSHIPS AND FAMILY LIFE
AND OUR INNER LIFE.**

REFLECT ON THIS:

-----"HOW CAN I MAKE A STRAIGHTER PATH

AND MORE ROOM FOR GOD IN MY LIFE?”

**SECONDLY, WE NEED TO GET RID OF EVERYTHING
IN OUR LIVES THAT IS A BARRIER TO GOD.**

**WHEN JOHN THE BAPTIST
SPOKE THE WORDS OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH
ABOUT THE LEVELING OF THE MOUNTAINS AND LIFTING UP OF THE VALLEYS,
HE WAS TALKING ABOUT JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS
BECOMING THE NORM.**

**HE WAS POINTING TO A WORLD WHERE
“GOOD NEWS” WAS A REALITY.**

**HE SPOKE OF THE KIND OF WORLD IT WOULD BE
WHEN GOD WAS TRULY IN CHARGE,**

**A WORLD JESUS SAID HIS MINISTRY WOULD BE ALL ABOUT. (LUKE
4:18-19)**

**“THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE HAS ANOINTED ME TO
BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE
TO THE CAPTIVES AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO LET THE
OPPRESSED GO FREE, TO PROCLAIM THE YEAR OF THE LORD’S FAVOR.”**

TO CELEBRATE THE ADVENT OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

IS TO LINE OUR LIVES UP WITH GOD'S PURPOSES

AND JOIN THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST

IN BRINGING "GOOD NEWS"

TO THE CORNER OF THE WORLD WE INHABIT.

RECENTLY, I WAS WITH A GROUP OF CLERGY AND WE WERE SHARING OUR

CHURCH APPROACHES AND ATTITUDES TO CHRISTMAS GIVING.

**ONE CHURCH URGED THEIR INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES TO INCLUDE IN THEIR
PREPARATION FOR THE SEASON....**

THE GIVING OF A SIGNIFICANT GIFT OF THE WORLD OF CHRIST.

THIS WAS AN EXTRA GIFT NOT FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH...

IT WAS TO SOMEHOW BRING "GOOD NEWS"

TO THE POOR,

OR FREEDOM FOR THOSE IN BONDAGE

OR HEALING FOR THOSE WHO ARE ILL.

THEY CALLED IT A..... "SPIRIT OF THE LORD GIFT."

I THEN SHARED WHAT WE DO HERE AT FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.

EACH YEAR OUR BOARD OF BENEVOLANCE

DESIGNATES A SPECIFIC PLACE TO BRING "GOOD NEWS"

TO THE POOR,

FREEDOM FOR THOSE IN BONDAGE

AND HEALING.

THIS YEAR OUR CHRISTMAS EVE GIFT

OUR "SPIRIT OF THE LORD GIFT"

WILL GO TO THE SCHOOL BASED HEALTH CENTERS.

WHEN WE TURN OUR ATTENTION OUTWARD
AND PREPARE TO FOLLOW CHRIST IN OUR GIVING AND REACHING OUT,
WE AUTOMATICALLY BEGIN TO WORK ON REMOVING THE BARRIERS
TO GOD'S PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES
AND IN OUR WORLD!

NOW.....LET US LOOK AT.....

(2) *"THAT WHICH IS POSSIBLE ONLY FOR GOD"*

WHEN WE HAVE DONE ALL WE CAN DO TO MAKE ROOM FOR GOD
AND TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO THE PRESENCE OF GOD,
IT IS TIME TO TRUST GOD FOR THE OUTCOME OF ALL THINGS.

WE HAVE CONTROL OVER OUR ACTIONS
AND EVEN A SMALL INFLUENCE ON THE WORLD AROUND US ...

BUT—WE ARE NOT ABLE TO BRING ABOUT THE STUNNING COMPLETION
OF ALL THINGS –

THE FINAL GOAL OF GOD'S DIVINE PURPOSES – NAMELY...

"ALL FLESH SHALL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD!"

THAT'S WHAT ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT.

GIVE YOURSELVES ONCE AGAIN

TO THE WONDERFUL VICTORY OF GOD'S DIVINE PURPOSES

IN OUR WORLD.

A NEW WORLD

WHICH IS DESCRIBED IN SOME OF THE LAST WORDS OF OUR BIBLE:

REV: 21: 1-4

"THEN I SAW A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH; FOR THE FIRST HEAVEN
AND THE FIRST EARTH HAD PASSED AWAY, AND THE SEA WAS NO MORE.
AND I SAW THE HOLY CITY, THE NEW JERUSALEM, COMING DOWN OUT OF
HEAVEN FROM GOD, PREPARED AS A BRIDE ADORNED FOR HER HUSBAND.
AND I HEARD A LOUD VOICE FROM THE THRONE SAYING, 'SEE, THE HOME OF
GOD IS AMONG MORTALS. HE WILL DWELL WITH THEM AS THEIR GOD; THEY
WILL BE HIS PEOPLE, AND GOD HIMSELF WILL BE WITH THEM; HE WILL WIPE
EVERY TEAR FROM THEIR EYES. DEATH WILL BE NO MORE MOURNING AND
CRYING AND PAIN WILL BE NO MORE, FOR THE FIRST THINGS HAVE PASSED
AWAY

JOHN THE BAPTIST SAID IT BEST,

"PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD,

MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.

EVERY VALLEY SHALL BE FILLED,

AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL SHALL BE MADE LOW,

AND CROOKED SHALL BE MADE STRAIGHT

AND THE ROUGH WAYS MADE SMOOTH,

AND ALL FLESH SHALL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD."