

Second Sunday of Advent

December 4, 2022

St. Luke 3:1-6:

“Salvation”

- I. Who They Are.
- II. The Word for Nobodies.
- III. Made Worthy.

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St. Luke 3:1-6

Dear Friends in Christ,

Can you identify the following quotation: "I have spent the best years of my life giving people the higher pleasures, helping them to have a good time, and all I get is abuse, the existence of a hunted man." That statement was made by Twentieth Century gangster, Al Capone, considered by some to be the most notorious gangster of American history. He's not only an example of self-righteousness but gross self-delusion.

We must hear this Word through Paul as we approach The Last Day: "Therefore God sends them (the grossly self-righteous) strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:11,12)." I love the way David put it because it puts everybody in their proper place:

"But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own we have given you. For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding (I Chron. 29:14,)."

On this Second Sunday of Advent, we know there is a Star that will soon be making its appearance in, of all places, Bethlehem. It will point to the birth place of God in the flesh, our Jesus. To the world He is mostly insignificant. For God's people He brings...

SALVATION

I. Who They Are.

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar - when Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being Tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas...(vv, 1,2).

In the first place, this list puts a stamp of historicity on the Scripture. That's a matter of fact throughout the entire Scriptures. The skeptic or unbelieving mind tries to dismiss Scripture as myth, or exaggeration, or contradictory. Its historicity says otherwise.

In the second place, the people listed are significant and, more than likely, saw themselves as worthy of who they were and what they had. How do their names effect us: Pontius Pilate - Herod - Annas - Caiaphas? How about cold? Would it be fair to see them as somebodies? Well, I like David's words: "But who am I, and what is my people...for all things come from you, and of your own we have given you." You see? God's people understand: everything good thing we are and have and do and give belongs to God, and He gives it to us in accordance with His will! David's words say it all: "Our days on earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding (I Chron. 29:15b).

And that brings us to this: "...the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness (v2)." John the Baptist. To the world a nobody. But of the names I've mentioned, which ones evoke Godly thoughts? Which ones stand head and shoulders above the rest? Of course, David, and on this Sunday of Advent, John, the son of Zechariah, the cousin of Jesus. And that brings us to these words of our text:

II. The Word for Nobodies.

And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness; "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 the crooked shall

become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God. (vss.3-6)”

We each have to take care of life's issues. But the greatest issue is the eternal life we have been given in Christ. I'm standing here looking at faces both pastors have known for a long time. And we've experienced it plenty of times: The Sunday morning greeting connected to an uplifting, familiar smile, followed by some talk, maybe a laugh, maybe a tear. And somewhere between that moment and a day during the following week a phone call, followed by a trip to the hospital, followed by a journey of struggle, followed by the last words spoken at a grave side. We've seen it plenty. We'll see it more, until the day God takes us out. Hurt? Of course it does. Rejoice? Without question; in Christ for victory!

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” begins John's cry. P.E. Kretzmann commentary on this is very good:

...let no one be indifferent to (Christ's) advent (His coming). Make the highways straight...let all hypocrisy be removed far from you...Every ravine shall be filled up; all anxious minds and discouraged hearts shall take confident courage, for the King is coming to pay the penalty for, and forgive, all their sins. Every mountain and hill shall be made low; all self righteous, proud spirits shall be broken and brought to the understanding that without Jesus they cannot escape the wrath to come. The tortuous and crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places shall be made smooth; all those that are lost in the error of their own lusts, all those that are seeking, by devious ways, to enter into life, should cast their foolish thoughts far from them and come to Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. (Kretzmann, Popular Commentary of the Bible, New Testament, Vol. I, pp. 279,280.)

Let's put it this way: an everyday person before Almighty God is a person who humbles himself or herself before the Lord and confesses, “I, a poor miserable sinner, confess to you all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended you and justly deserve your present and eternal punishment.” Such a person might be a somebody of importance in the eyes of certain people, but the person understands that without Christ they - we - are just sinful people before our Holy God! We're worthy of nothing before God and we're deserving of nothing. The meaning of that is driven home by these words of the Apostle Paul in his references to Psalms 14 and 53:

“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one (Rm. 3:10-12).”

III. Made Worthy.

Our Lutheran Confessions state;

“When we teach that through the Holy Spirit's work we are reborn and justified, we do not mean that after regeneration no unrighteousness (sinfulness) in essence and life adheres to those who have been justified (pronounced not guilty of sin) and regenerated (born again to eternal life through faith in Christ), but we hold that Christ with his perfect obedience covers all our sins which throughout this life still inhere in our nature. (Tappert, Solid Declaration, 543.22).

That's one sentence. I've read it before. I've read it for myself many times. I've always appreciated the comfort it gives. I like to connect it to the following Scriptures: “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east

is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us (Ps. 103:11,12).” They’re out of sight, forgiven, forgotten. And, as written, “Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgressions for the remnant of his inheritance (Micah 7:18)?” “The remnant”, that peace of His church walking this earth from the past to the present, and will be here at the last moment. It’s what Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11).”

So, here’s the point: God comes to give salvation, to save sinful, undeserving, everyday people to be His forever. Christ died on the Cross for sinful, everyday, undeserving people. When life in this world ends, everyday, undeserving people who held on to Jesus will enter eternal life. And on that day when Christ returns and graves are opened, sinful, everyday people who held to Jesus will be standing at the right hand of Jesus in their resurrected bodies. Special and important here? Is that really an issue of abiding concern? No, it isn’t.

Do you remember Zacchaeus? He was a “chief tax collector and was rich.” He was a *somebody*, alright, somebody despised by the people. In reality, he was seen as a *nobody*, nobody could stomach. But Jesus entered Zacchaeus’ life and Zacchaeus was brought to faith. Remember what Jesus said about him, about you and me? “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost (Lk. 19:10).”

As a child of God through faith in Christ, how do you feel about...you? David said: “Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings...(Ps. 17:8).” That’s who we are: *the apple of His eye covered by the shadow of (His) wings*. Forever! He has given us salvation.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott