

Sermon Text for December 6, 2015

Jeremiah 33:14-16, Luke 1:46-55
“The Magnificat”

This second Sunday in Advent we light a candle and we proclaim that Jesus Christ is our Way. In fact Jesus himself states in John that he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. But what is this way like, what type of road did Jesus prepare for us as he walked upon this earth? In our Scripture reading for today it becomes obvious the way God has set out for his people and what path he has set before us. The way of Christ, we shall see, is humility. Mary in our Scripture this morning realizes her humble state and how God demands humility from us if we are going to follow him. We’ve all had experiences of humility that have reminded us that maybe we’re not perfect after all.

Our first Christmas together as husband and wife came with a bit of humility for me. We got a perfect Christmas tree, but the only problem is that there were just a couple branches that didn’t quite fit into the stand that we had, so we had to find a way to cut those two branches off, not difficult to do, right? When you’re married, and both students, a chain saw or anything that might be able to saw things is normally in your house. But we did have a brand new set of kitchen knives, those really sharp ones, including one that was like a meat cleaver, now that would do the trick? I didn’t share this great idea with Stacy, so I got the knife, took a hack at that limb and Ding, was the sound that it made. What was that? Stacy asked. I looked at the knife and it literally seemed like someone had taken a bite out of it, it was totally useless. I am no longer allowed to use a knife to cut branches on our Christmas trees.

One of the reasons why we wanted you to get to know Julia is to have you seen first hand what a normal, young nearly teenage girl is like in the 21st century. She has memories that are fun, ideas and goals to shoot for, there is an innocence and an optimism that marks young people of that age. In the 1st century it was very different, girls that age their normalcy began with thinking about starting a family. For Mary, even that thought was taken to another level with the visit of Gabriel.

Let’s read now one of the most humble songs we hear in Scripture: the magnificat of Mary which is so appropriate for this second Sunday of Advent as we await the coming of our Savior just like Mary, our young teenage girl, was awaiting her child when she spoke these words.

Today we are celebrating Advent as the church is completely decorated with its flowers and its greens. There is no other time of the year when the celebration continues longer than it does for us during Advent, even as we wait with anticipation the coming of the Christ. It is good that Advent is a celebration. If you remember our church has just passed through a season of resurrection, where in less than a month we celebrated 6 different people who went to be with the Lord. Not to dwell on this aspect of Advent and the Christmas season, but a part of the reality in which we live is that tension that we know exists as there are those around us who this Christmas is not going to be a celebration. In fact, I would argue that every single one of us has some poignant memories of this season, pangs of recognizing that a special loved one is not present, someone we wish were present. They could have been with Jesus just for this past year, or it could be decades since we last saw them. The magnificat is perfectly suited for us this week as Mary teaches us about humility, a sentiment that may seem out of place in celebration, and yet is just what our Savior ordered.

To set the stage for you, the angel Gabriel tells Mary she is pregnant and that her relative Elizabeth who was barren is also pregnant. She runs to meet Elizabeth and Elizabeth's baby does a somersault. Elizabeth calls Mary blessed among women and the mother of her Lord. For Mary to be exalted and lifted up by her older relative could have been quite a heady thing for her.

But Mary responds to these accolades with this song that we call the magnificat. In this song she calls herself the lowly servant. She talks about how the strength of God brings down the proud. She rejoices that the powerful are brought down from their thrones and the lowly are lifted up. She praises God because He has made the hungry full and sent the rich away empty.

The key word to this song is humility. She is showing us that the way to God and the way of God is humility. She could have been proud of her role in the salvation story, which is no small role, but no, she insists that all glory be given to God. I know that the humbleness of Mary would be offended by anyone claiming that she is a co-redeemer with Jesus Christ our Lord.

Humility is a very common theme to preach on from Scripture because Scripture is filled with examples of how the weak overcome the mighty. From Moses and Pharaoh, to David and Goliath we find that God uses that which is considered weak in this world to overcome that which is considered mighty. That follows Paul's passage in II

Corinthians 12:9 which reminds us that God's grace is sufficient for us, and His power is made perfect in our weakness.

You realize that there is not a single passage in the Bible where power is praised or even considered desirable by us. Zechariah 4 states that it is not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord. This, then, is the key to humility and is the way of Christ. We are not to consider power as something to be desired or even wanted. Service in humility should be our calling and not power through might.

What is happening in our nation? I had a conversation with a member of our church this past week and we were actually talking about politics and he said I am glad that you don't speak directly about politics, you give us Scripture and then let us decide. I don't know if you realize how huge of a compliment that is. But I do have to ask the question, what is happening in our country? Is it a political statement to say that the violence that people are exhibiting by displaying their power through killing other people has become a pandemic. Keep in mind this is from someone who went hunting Monday and Tuesday with the chief, but can we not ask the question what is happening in our nation?

I wish it would make us humbly turn to God for guidance and understanding, and above all wisdom. It takes humility to recognize that you need help and guidance. Unfortunately we are not the most humble country. We use up to 70% of the world's energy, we have the most powerful economy on the globe, we let people know that we have the most powerful military on the earth. It is hard to be humble when you are an American. Until another, and then another, and then another shooting takes place. But humble we must be because it is the way of Christ. Statements of retaliation and declarations that America is only for Americans only breeds hate and speaks contrary to what Mary's whole point in this Scripture today is. The Lord will take care of those who seek power. When we try to force the issue, then the Lord is not able to work as He would like.

Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior fulfilled all those things that Mary prophesied in her song. He scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts as he drove out the money changers and religious leaders from the temple. He brought down the powerful such as Pontius Pilate as Pilate put King of the Jews on his cross, and as Jesus lifted up the lowly such as the widow who put her mite in the offering.

He filled the hungry with food and teachings at the feeding of the 5,000 and sent the rich young ruler away empty. Jesus Christ is the personification of humility. From his humbling birth in a cattle stall that we anticipate this Advent season, to his death on the cross as a common criminal Jesus Christ has shown us the way and that way is humility. Advent should be a season of humility as we await our Savior. But look around you as you go out today in the world and you will find that humility is hard to find. In this Advent season how can we help but recognize that the Savior that we serve, and love and adore chose the way of humility and made himself to be humble so that we could triumph over sin and death. We anticipate the hope that we have that this humble Christ is coming again.

I have made a national plea for humility to our leaders and now I want to make a plea for humility to each of us personally. Humility is being able to put others ahead of you, being able to put their needs and wants as more important than your own. Humility is giving someone the benefit of the doubt and if they make a mistake or a hurtful statement then consider it a lapse instead of a character flaw. Humility is being able to keep words to ourselves even if it is the juiciest piece of information which usually ends up being disinformation. Humility is being able to take responsibility for broken relationships because only then can they begin to heal. Humility is being Almighty God and lowering yourself to become man and be born in a stable and to go through life ridiculed and on the run and eventually suffering on a cross so that all of the human race has a chance to meet your father. This is humility and this is the way of Christ.

We have been humbled this week. Scripture tells us that we need to humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift us up. Let us follow the way of Jesus Christ, who leads us to a life of humility. Amen.