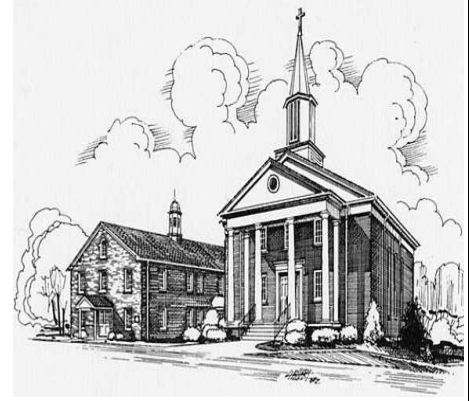


**The Lessons Appointed for Use on the
Second Sunday of Advent**

**Year C
RCL**



Malachi 3:1-4
Canticle 16
Luke 3:1-6

The Collect

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Malachi 3:1-4

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight – indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

Canticle 16 Page 92, BCP

The Song of Zechariah

Benedictus Dominus Deus

Luke 1: 68-79

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;
 he has come to his people and set them free.
He has raised up for us a mighty savior,
 born of the house of his servant David.
Through his holy prophets he promised of old,
that he would save us from our enemies,
 from the hands of all who hate us.
He promised to show mercy to our fathers
 and to remember his holy covenant.
This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham,
 to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
Free to worship him without fear,
 holy and righteous in his sight
 all the days of our life.
You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High,
 for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
To give his people knowledge of salvation
 by the forgiveness of their sins.
In the tender compassion of our God
 the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,
 and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
 as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

Luke 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 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 the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out 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 be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.””

SERMON

I spoke a couple of Sundays ago of Pilate's question, "What is truth?" I think we are living into Pilate's question and I'm alarmed by it. Someone posted a picture of Donald Trump on Facebook with the caption, "Do accuracy and truth still matter on the campaign trail?" One of my more acerbic friends replied, "No. Next question." When we turn to the events recounted in Scripture, we are forced to engage our personal position on Pilate's question, and I'm frightened about what our unspoken answer might be. Is there truth, or is well-informed (or, more often, poorly-informed) opinion the best we can hope for?

In our text last Sunday, Jesus told a parable.

"Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking

place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.”

The church has understood since time out of mind that the coming of John the Baptist was one of those sprouted leaves, heralding the coming of the Christ, just as Malachi predicted:

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight – indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

Are Malachi’s words truth, or mere matters of belief – opinions in other words? How does our time find truth? From the television? Let’s imagine that the Middle East in the time of Jesus was afflicted with the same 24 hour news coverage that we endure. Twenty-four hour news coverage demands that at any time of the day or night somebody’s mouth must be moving. It would

be nice if the moving mouths were saying important things, but in the way of these things, it is more important that the mouths be moving than that they have anything significant to say. So, in the Middle East of Jesus' time, one news channel might report:

“A protest erupted today led by a man who calls himself ‘John’. Although the protest remained largely peaceful, Temple authorities remained on alert because his followers were critical of the Temple itself. In an exclusive interview with his father, Zechariah, we learned that his son had withdrawn to the wilderness some time ago after becoming increasingly distressed by what he saw as corruption in the Temple.”

From another channel we might learn,

“The leader of a small group of radical Jews gathered his followers and said that the word of God had come to him in the wilderness. Temple authorities are skeptical and were quoted as saying, ‘Often mentally ill people

make these kinds of claims, but obviously if the word of God were to come to anyone, it would be here in His own Temple’”

Then both channels would go to some moving mouths attached to experts who would spoon-feed an interpretation of the event consistent with the world view of the station’s management to the listeners. How are we to sort out truth from this plague of moving mouths? “Aye! There’s the rub”, Shakespeare wrote.

My brother-in-law, known far and wide within the family as Saint Christopher because he is the most self-denying, other directed and love motivated human being I have ever met, works for Fox News. The world view reflected by Fox gives me hives. I tend to watch (if I must) BBC or CNN. I’m much more comfortable with the underlying narrative of these two sources of moving mouths. When BBC says one thing and Fox an-

other, I believe BBC. Jeanette probably believes Fox. Is that significant? Yes, that is very significant. What is actually happening when we make choices like these is that we are seeking reinforcement of our own preferences. We are not searching for truth or an examination of alternatives. Not even a dialog. We are seeking reinforcement of our preferences. We have imprisoned ourselves in silos which echo our preferred view of the world and by echoing our preferences, reinforce them.

Bishop Timothy Dolan said:

“Maybe the greatest threat to the Church is not heresy, not dissent, not secularism, not even moral relativism, but this sanitized, feel-good, boutique, therapeutic spirituality that makes no demands, calls for no sacrifice, asks for no conversion, entails no battle against sin, but only soothes and affirms”.

Given our druthers, we don't seek truth. We seek soothing. We seek affirmation of what we always

thought. The last thing in this world we would like to see is John the Baptist announcing that the word of God had come to him, and he was bound to deliver it, unvarnished and naked of our preferences. “The word of God came to John” is religious code for “he got hooked up”. We do not like hooked up people. Truth be told, we don’t even want to admit that there might **be** hooked up people unless they’ve been safely dead for a couple millennia. What we want is to be soothed in the arms of a loving mother who will tell us we are loved. What we don’t want is the voice of Father telling us to “Get up out of that bed and get your chores done.” One of the ways we dull ourselves to Father's voice is to allow ourselves to be soothed into believing that there is no answer to Pilate's question. There is no truth. There is only opinion, belief, moving mouths and the dull echo within our self-imposed silos.

The words of a hooked up person scare us spitless because we know that such a one brings a message of change and the demand that we must move beyond our comfort zone. Malachi tells us:

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight – indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap...

“See?”, he is saying. “One is coming who will announce the new covenant. You know you cannot stand before such a one, but there is good news! He comes to refine you, to change you from what you think you are to what you can become! Hosanna! There is truth, and truth will come to you!” We don't have to be afraid of the change that is on offer. We can be hooked up, too,

but our part is that we must be willing to abandon our silos and hear the truth.

Claiming the name Christian means being hooked up to the power that created the universe. Claiming the name Christian means you can step out of your silo into the world confident that you are not alone. Claiming the name Christian most definitely does NOT mean a sanitized, feel-good, boutique, therapeutic spirituality that makes no demands, calls for no sacrifice, asks for no conversion, entails no battle against sin, but only soothes and affirms. To claim the name Christian is to throw your lot in with people who have given their lives for the name. To claim the name Christian is to embrace the change that will refine you until you are fit to bring the Gospel into the world with you as a fully-fledged hooked up person. Resolve this Advent to live into the promises of our Lord. Get hooked up!

AMEN

BENEDICTION

I'm no good with gooshy emotions, so the best I can do to show you how much I love you is to get you a really good Christmas present. Here is my Christmas wish for you: I wish you a challenging Christmas and a transformative faith. I wish for you a life unhooked from the distractions of the culture around you and hooked up to the power that spoke the world into existence. I pray that the word of God be visited on you and in you and through everything you do.

Until we meet again, may the Lord bless you, and keep you. May the Lord lift His countenance upon you, and be gracious to you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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