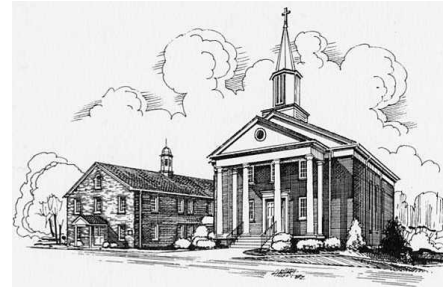


The Lessons Appointed for Use on the Second Sunday of Advent

Year A
RCL



Romans 15:4-13
Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19
Matthew 3:1-12

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.*

Romans 15:4-13

Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs,

and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

"Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles,
and sing praises to your name";

and again he says,

"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people";
and again,

"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all the peoples praise him";
and again Isaiah says,

"The root of Jesse shall come,
the one who rises to rule the Gentiles;
in him the Gentiles shall hope."

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.’”

Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees

coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

“I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but

the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

SERMON

Who remembers “The Marvelous Toy”?

**When I was just a wee little lad full of
health and joy
My father homeward came one night and
gave to me a toy
A wonder to behold, it was, with many
colors bright
And the moment I laid eyes on it it be-
came my heart's delight**

(Cho:)

**It went "zip" when it moved and "bop"
when it stopped
And "whirr" when it stood still
I never knew just what it was and I guess
I never will.¹**

That's us! The marvelous toy our Father has
given us is life, the universe and just everything!

¹ “The Marvelous Toy” Words and Music by Tom Paxton

We never quite know what it is, and I guess we never will, but it is marvelous to play with God's creation and the people which fill it. The only question is how to do that without ruining the fun for everyone? It's complicated, so God's gift to us came with a set of instructions. We call them "The Ten Commandments", but that's honestly too legalistic for me. I prefer to think of them as The Ten Reminders, things to keep in mind so everyone has a good time. They're not complicated, and they make very good sense. Paraphrasing, they are:

- 1. I am the LORD your God, and nobody but me is giving you this marvelous toy. No one but me COULD give you this marvelous toy.**
- 2. Don't make up other gods and try to be grateful to them. You'll just confuse yourself.**

- 3. You can talk with me anytime you need to, but if you do, be serious about it. Don't go shouting my name as an expression of surprise. That's distracting to both of us.**
- 4. There's a time to play and a time to rest. Every week, take a little time off to remember who gave you all this. You can play tomorrow.**
- 5. Your parents love and care for you, because I made them that way. Pay attention to them!**
- 6. Don't murder each other. Do I really have to tell you this? Just...DON'T**
- 7. The ability to love and form families is another gift to you. Don't meddle with other people's spouse. I'll have more to say on this, later.**
- 8. Don't mess around with the other kids' stuff. It won't end well. You'll have fights instead of fun.**
- 9. Don't you lie about my other children. I**

mean it!

10. Be happy with what I've given you, and show a little gratitude, will you? If you needed the stuff I gave to other people, I would have given it to you.

There's little criticism which could be brought against the Ten Reminders. They're good, solid playground rules and if everyone followed them, we'd all have a great time. But we're people and we have a seemingly inexhaustible ability to convince ourselves that this or that "special need" requires that we ignore the rules. The awful things we have done during war times in the name of national security are good examples. The negligence and lack of compassion which led to the awful death from flu of a 16 year old in our custody this week is another one.

Clearly, if we're all going to have fun with the marvelous toy our Father has given us, we're going to need something more than a list of rules. We're going to need someone to show us how to play nice. Isaiah predicted that such a one would come.

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

That prophesy from the man we sometimes call "First Isaiah" comes to us from five or six hundred years before the time of Jesus and a culture that was flattened several times thereafter. Yet, we still

have his words and we are meant to heed them. Hundreds of years later, Paul, in his letter to the church in Rome, reminded the Christians of his time that Christ Jesus was the one of whom Isaiah was speaking and of the importance of paying attention to folks who know better:

Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Living in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, allows everyone to play with this marvelous toy in safety and joy and to

give thanks to God for so marvelous a gift.

Not everyone gets it. In the time of John the Baptist, there were sects of Judaism. Two of those were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. We tend to think of them as the bad guys, but that's not fair. They just misunderstood and were getting in the way of everybody's fun.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance."

Well, that's pretty harsh. It's also instructive. You can play with others and everybody can have fun if you just turn from whatever is keeping you from playing nice, and realize that God loves all His children. Instead, both the Pharisees and the Sad-

ducees were offering themselves up as umpires, and as necessary as umpires are to life, the universe and just everything these two groups were harshing everyone's buzz. How do you play with the marvelous toy peaceably if the umpire keeps telling you you're not doing it right? And while we're on the subject, who appointed you as special? John shoots that down pretty thoroughly.

Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

What John is saying is that you don't get to think of yourself as special. "You're nothing but a stone", John tells them. "You're tripping people up. Play nice, and let your brothers and sisters play,

too.”

Think of the miracle happening here, right before your eyes. Jesus was born 2,000 years ago in a powerless country in a town of no note, yet we have carefully passed His story on to our children as did our parents and their parents and their parents before them. We know its value instinctively, even when we sometimes allow it to become just ritual. Soon enough, we always find our way back.

**Well, the years have gone by too quickly,
it seems
I have my own little boy
And yesterday I gave to him my mar-
velous little toy
His eyes nearly popped right out of his
head
And he gave a squeal of glee
Neither one of us knows just what it is**

But he loves it, just like me

**It still goes "zip" when it moves, "bop"
when it stops**

And "whirr" when it stands still

I never knew just what it was

And I guess I never will

I never knew just what it was

And I guess I never will

AMEN

BENEDICTION

Paul continued:

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Our welcome to each other isn't because we're polite, or because we're generally nice people, nor even because that's the way we were brought up. Our welcome to each other and our visitors reflects the glory of God and His gift of life, our marvelous toy. Play nice!

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square

brackets.

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