

Sermon: “What Are We Waiting For?” Part II (ADVENT)

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The Federated Church of Hyannis ~ Sunday, December 6, 2020

Scripture: Ephesians 1:3-14

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.

Introduction:

Today is the second Sunday of Advent. The second candle of Advent reminds us of faith and preparation. Last week we light the candle of hope which reminds us of what we have hope for and where does our source of hope come from.

Advent is the season of waiting in anticipation, which is why the series is entitled “What are we waiting for”. Each week during Advent we will examine expectations and anticipations in identifying what are we waiting for. This week we are looking at faith and preparation as part of what we are waiting for.

Part One: Faith

Faith is the substance of things hoped for and evidence of things not seen yet. (Hebrews 11:1) It may sound a little strange to consider faith and preparation as something to wait for. Yet waiting is a sign of giving something value or

significance. If we went to a restaurant and it had high reviews for the food, we might have faith that the extra time to prepare the food would be worth the wait. Faith is an exercise in trust. There are things we hope for and evidence of things not yet seen, but we place our faith in those things. An example I often share when talking about faith is a lesson I learned several years ago from some cargo pilots. They would fly large amounts of cargo across the ocean and to maximize the weight of the cargo they would decrease the weight of the fuel. Planes have maximum weight limits, and when calculating it a pilot must factor in the weight of the fuel in the tanks. To reduce weight, pilots will sometimes reduce the amount of fuel in the tank to lower the weight of the aircraft. So, for cargo pilots they sometimes will fly with only half the fuel they need to get from point A to point B. So for cargo pilots flying across the ocean, there is no place to land and refuel. Instead they train and prepare to do mid-air refueling. There are planes that function like gas stations in the sky. A tube connects the planes together in the air and fuel is pumped from one aircraft to another. It takes incredible skill to do a mid-air refueling. The cargo pilots, when they take off, have to have faith that those refueling planes will meet them somewhere over the ocean. They have to have faith in their training to be able to connect and refuel mid-air. Imagine flying a plane knowing you only have enough fuel to get halfway across an ocean. It takes faith and preparation to commit to something like that.

Part Two: The Commitment of John the Baptist

Consider John the Baptist as someone of faith who prepared for the coming of the Messiah. He fully believed the Messiah would come in his life time and went into the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord. He devoted his whole life to the purpose of preparing the way for the arrival of the Messiah because he believed in providence and predestination.

Many modern theologians shy away from the theology of predestination. Yet we know from the location that the birth of Christ was predestined for centuries before hand. When the wisemen came bearing gifts, the city they were told to go to was well known to be the place where the Messiah would be born. It was predestined. The fact that a Messiah would come and be of a certain lineage of David was predestined. God had made covenants (promises) that specific things would happen. There cannot be prophesy if there is not also predestination. We commit in faith because we believe in the promises of God.

John the Baptist acted in faith when he went into the wilderness and began baptizing people in the Jordan river. Those who received John's baptism were

preparing for the coming of the Messiah. They were committed to the promises of God.

Part 3: Commitment to Following Jesus

Over the last several decades, the concept of commitment has declined. Many companies and organizations have seen a decline membership and customer loyalty. Few companies have employees willing to make a 20-year commitment to a career. The culture of such institutions has faced drastic challenges. We see defaults in financial commitment. We see lawyers negotiating terms for dissolutions of contracts. We see a whole host of problems that stem from distrust and loss of faith in institutions that once held high levels of trust.

There are a lot of people in America that have lost trust and faith in the church, and I think it stems from the decline of faith formation education. Once upon a time the church prepared young people for a life of faith. Many of you in this church grew up with a Sunday school program and a Confirmation program that prepared you for a life of faith. There were pastors and Sunday school teachers who prepared you to make a commitment to accepting Jesus into your life. Membership in a church was a long process of faith formation. The classes, the volunteer projects, the church events, the attendance badges helped prepare people of faith to live a committed life of faith. Following Christ is a commitment.

One of the hardest things for me during this pandemic is the struggle of being told it is not necessary to go to church. If you were raised the way I was, not going to church was not an option. People of faith go to church because that is part of the commitment of following Jesus. Six days you labor and on the seventh day you go to church. During this pandemic I do believe it is necessary to take precautionary measures. If you are learning how to use Zoom and Facebook to attend worship online, you are making a commitment.

Part 4: God's Commitment to Us

I want to share the importance that God has also made a commitment to us. People waited for centuries for God to fulfill His promise to send a Messiah. There were many like John the Baptist, Isaiah, Malachi, Jeremiah, Amos, and other prophets who prepared people of faith for the coming of Christ. God worked through them to prepare the way of the Lord. They taught and prepared people waiting in expectation and anticipation of God's promise to come true. The words of God's commitment to us is in this morning's scripture reading. Hear it one more time.

Ephesians 1:3-14

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.

Conclusion:

This is the conclusion I want to leave us with. Did God prepare a way for us? Is that way a life of faith? And how will we prepare to pass this faith on to future generations?

As I have said many times already, this is the time to prepare so we can pass a legacy of faith on to those who will come after us. This is a time of preparation and faith.

Next week will be part 3 of our series, “What are we Waiting For?”