

The four Sundays of Advent focus on a particular theme from the life of Christ, such as hope, love, joy and peace. Each Sunday is represented by a purple or a blue candle, except the third Sunday (today) that is represented by a pink candle, and focuses on joy.

My friend **Sharon Pearson** is a Christian educator and she wrote a commentary for the third week in Advent. Her commentary so closely mirrored what I was thinking about the scriptures for today, that I thought it was worth sharing her words with you this morning.

Sharon said, "This Gospel always made me stop and think. Everything I believe about my faith hangs on the idea that Jesus is Lord. And here we have his cousin John wondering if he really is the messiah. I for one wanted a little more confidence in the answer to the question, "Are you the one or are we to wait for another?"

And then there is the answer – not a simple yes or no, but a do you see the signs or not. It begs the question, what is real?

Real is the love of God. Real is feeding a hungry child. Real is helping someone find permanent housing. Real is seeing an addict say no to their drug of choice. Real is seeing miracles in our everyday lives. What is not real, is doing good in order to be recognized and rewarded for it – instantly."

The words that struck me most were that God's love is real. **God is love, and God's love for us is real.** God's love is perhaps the most real thing we ever experience, and **when it is missing, we know it.** We are connected to God and to each other through love. I have learned through experience that human beings are all subject to the laws of nature in this temporal life we live. **However, Love exists beyond the laws of nature,** and the more I learn, the more I am convinced that love is the only thing that is **not subject to the laws of nature – proving for me that God is indeed, love.**

Love is the one thing that when given away, grows larger. Love is the only thing that can defy the laws of nature, the laws of reduction. **The more we give away, the more we have.**

God gave us the ultimate gift of love – he sent his son to save us. What does it mean to be saved? The Greek word for "save" (*sozo*) can mean to save, **keep from harm, rescue, heal, or liberate.** We can be saved from a number of things that threaten our lives like our health and our safety, but Jesus comes to save our souls by keeping us connected to God, especially when the world gets the better of us, and drives a wedge between us, God, and each other.

Most of the time I think we need to be saved from ourselves. I need to be saved from my **doubts and fears.** We as humans are often easily swayed, and do not always trust ourselves, even when we see with our own eyes and hear with our own ears. It was clear that **John had doubts and fears.** He was **in jail,** and unsure if this crazy life he was living had actually yielded the fruit God promised his life would bring.

Jesus is really questioning John's faith in the way he answers. He is asking if all the signs of the Messiah have been witnessed in the blind receiving sight, the deaf hearing, the lame walking, etc. The point seems to be this, "**Did you see it happen with your own eyes? Then believe it with your whole heart.**" Trust God, trust yourself, and put doubt and fear behind you -- live into the joy and wonder of God's love.

There was a story on Facebook the other day that was a modern day illustration of doubting yourself and the fear that can overtake your faith, the author is not known.

When I was in 7th grade, our teacher put on a video and told us to take notes. Ten minutes in, she threw the lights on and shouted at Steven Webb Sladki, telling him he wasn't taking notes and he should have been. But the thing was, Steve was taking notes. I saw it. We all saw it. The teacher asked if anyone wanted to stand up for Steve. A few of us choked out some words of defense but were immediately squashed. Quickly, we were all very silent. Steve was sent to the principal's office. The teacher came back in the room and said something like "See how easy that was?" We were reading "Anne Frank." I started to understand. I just thought now was a good time to share this story. Don't ever let anyone tell you that what you see with your own eyes isn't happening.

The moral of this story applies in the time the Gospel was written, and in our time today – whenever fail to acknowledge what we see to be the truth, and the truth will set us free. **The signs were clear, people were witnessing miracles foretold in scripture, yet still, they doubted, feared – what would it mean for them to be saved? Who would they become? How would their lives change – yipe, change!**

Personally I have had some experience in putting fear and doubt behind me and trusting God, tomorrow

is the one-year anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood.

If you are ever **thinking of ordained ministry**, I have to say, you need to be ready for some **serious self-examination**, and questions from dozens of people who want to be sure that you have a genuine call, and are not out of your mind – if ever there was a time for self-doubt for me, that was it.

One day in particular, a friend asked me why I wanted to become a priest. I said, "Because God called me." They replied, "**Called you? Like on the phone? Did you hear a voice or did God appear in front of you?**" "Well, no, nothing like that," I said. "Then what?" they continued. "Why would you give up your career, and benefits to become a priest, does it pay well?" Over and over people wondered what it meant to be called by God. Over and over I had to answer, and many times just hearing myself answer, I had lots of doubts – was I crazy? Why did I give up my career when I liked my job? According to preacher **Joyce Meyer**, DOUBT is the twin brother of FEAR, and those twins were pulling me away from the joy God wanted for me.

My spiritual director gave me some very good advice once when I was particularly anxious about going through the process of becoming a priest. She said, "Live into the wonder of being called." I think what she was saying was that I needed to live into the joy that God wanted for my life.

Today we celebrate the joy of Jesus in preparing for **remembering**, and **re-experiencing the birth** of Christ at Christmas. The words of the Canticle illuminate the joy of the coming of Christ very well:

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name.”

Therefore, put fear and doubt behind you in this season of joy and rejoicing, and make ready for the birth of Christ. Advent is a time we should slow down and live into the wonder that hangs in the air this time of year. Some tell us to **slow down**, and take **one day at a time**. Really, we have only **one moment** at a time. In **“every breath you take, and every move you make”** you have the ability to repent, to turn away from what keeps you from being in right relationship with God, and ready to receive joy that comes with salvation.

We cannot survive on a breath we took yesterday. We cannot survive on a breath we will take tomorrow. We have only this moment, and this breath to take.

Breathe in anticipation, breath out anxiety. Breathe in joy, breath out unreasonable expectations. Breathe in quiet reflection, breath out commercialized noise. Breathe in light, breath out darkness.

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. Let every heart, prepare Him room, and repeat the sounding joy. Amen

Third Sunday of Advent
Year A RCL

- [Isaiah 35:1-10](#)
- [James 5:7-10](#)
- [Matthew 11:2-11](#)
- [Canticle 15](#)