

Advent 3B
St. John 1:6-8, 19-28
December 17, 2017
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Good News: Real Hope!

“He has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn...”

Advent is a time for good news and hope. We look forward to Christmas with great anticipation.

We need to hear some good news these days. We have become anxious and stressed out by all the “bad news” with which we are bombarded daily. Turn on the TV and the news channels seek to seduce you and hold your attention by painting everything as “breaking news” which they will tell you about after the messages from their sponsors, which is really what the whole thing is about.

We need to hear some good news in a world that wants to expel Christmas again from its midst in lieu of some Winter Solstice unnamed generic holiday. Wake up from your long winter's nap: Christmas which was the reason for the season is on the way out for an orgy of consumerism and narcissism that deny the core and heart of what Christmas is supposed to be about. Where is Christmas this year in popular culture? Where is there a Christmas comedy movie in the theatres to make us smile? Instead we pay 12 dollars for a war story in outer space (the least offensive of the selections, or the panoply of horror or murder epics like the new Christmas Disney film, “Coco” that imagines a child's travels in the land of the dead, though a well done film, it is more suited to the holiday at the end of October than December 25th!

We need some good news as we deal with the stress many of us experience in our daily lives, some in the workplace in what one author called for many people, “bone-crushing jobs” that consume 40 years of your life leaving you 3 years of retirement according to longevity studies done by the AMA; or the bullies many children confront in school or now in social media; and then there is the stress brought into our homes as many struggle with diminishing finances trying to make paychecks stretch to cover their basic needs. And then there is the clutter that we have collected as a consequence of our consumeristic lifestyle. Wow! That sounds depressing. I don't want to get trapped in that! Oh, how we long for some really good news and not more of that other stuff!

We long for a simpler time of generosity and kindness, of togetherness, family, friends and love. And the good news is we still have access to those things and Christmas still holds them forth to you. We need to get back to the real Christmas and the real reasons for not only the season, but also life itself.

The real Christmas can teach us that: life is not at all about stuff or collecting it. It is not about paychecks and money, though we all need a source of sustenance. It is about people who are close to you and it is about love. The miracle of Christmas is how much God loves each one of

us. The miracle of Christmas is accepting that gift and then spreading it around. The impulse to give grows out of the realization of our own bounty and our gratitude for it. We want to give back. We want to see smiles on other faces. We want to spread good news through generosity and kindness that people do not have to be trapped by their possessions and unhappiness with life. I am so moved by the good news I witness this season where people look to help others with kindness, care and generosity, and often these folks are people they do not know: total strangers. Smiles are the goal and result of a Christmas well kept. And the biggest smile is the one beaming in your own heart.

The only real breaking news is that God is on the way to us! That is very good and comforting news. We are not alone. We are not floating adrift in a life of meaninglessness and drudgery. You matter. Your life matters. Everyone's life matters!

We need to hear some good news, a few glad tidings these days. We want to hear something positive and inspiring. I want to be motivated to be more than I have been, like what happened to Ebenezer Scrooge, when he received the visits from three ghosts. I want Christmas to make me something, someone new, renewed, better. I want Christmas to help me open my ears to hear. I want Christmas to help me open my eyes to really see. I want Christmas to open my frozen, unsmiling lips with great good news to tell instead of bad news; truth and not lies; true, real witness and not false witness; and blessings in place of curses. Christians should be smiling and we ought to be happy that Christmas is coming once again. God is here. Christmas should bring smiles to our faces and in our hearts.

What is the good news of Christians and Christmas? God is real. God is coming! God is here with us in this world, with us in our lives. The Great Good News for each of us is that we are far from being hopeless prisoners in a dark world. We are full of hope. Our future is hopeful. Our God and our faith in God is the source of this hope, and Christmas delivers that right under your tree.

Paul teaches us to rejoice always, to pray without ceasing, and to give thanks in all circumstances. This, he tells us, is the will of God for us. Rejoice. Pray. Give thanks. When you wake up in the morning do these three things and you will find happiness and purpose in life. Instead of waking up tomorrow, despairing of Monday morning, rejoice that you have been given one more day to live. Tomorrow could be the last day of your life. How will you spend the time? What are your priorities for the day? This is the day God has made, I will rejoice in be glad in it! Give thanks that you have been given this wonderful day, this opportunity to find happiness and make others happy! Pray without ceasing Paul says. Make your life a prayer offered up to God. You don't need to ask for things you already have in abundance! Tap into those and your dreams and hopes will become your reality!

Isaiah was anointed a long time ago to speak good news to us. John also came to bear witness to this good news;

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor...” Amen to that!