

**Philippians 1: 3-11**  
**Luke 3: 1-6**  
**December 16, 2012**  
**Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church**  
**Second Sunday of Advent**

This morning I address you as disciples of Jesus. You are here to worship God in this season. Indeed, you are here nearly every Sunday of every season. The celebrations come and go. The decorations appear and melt away. You are the disciples of Jesus who walk the path of faith every day. For you being a believer is a way of life. It is a path you follow in your own way with your own particular beliefs. During the week you engage in multiple activities many of which, on the surface at least, have little to do “church.” Yet because you follow the path of Jesus you bring your way of life and faith to everything you do. Because you follow in the way of Jesus faith and life intersect whether you are at work, part of a family or engaged in the community. I suspect that this time of year as you endure traffic jams, hunt for an elusive parking place, seek a gift that will bring joy to someone, you are even more conscious of the path of Jesus—if only because the holiday festival has virtually nothing to do with the birth of the Savior.

And finally, because you follow the path of Jesus, once a week the way brings you here publicly to celebrate your faith with others for whom following Jesus is a way of life. We gather, if for no other reason than to be with others who share our faith and so remind ourselves that we are not weird for trusting our lives to an invisible God who, we believe, made himself known in a human being named Jesus from Nazareth.

So it is as disciples of Jesus that I propose to you this thought: Advent is the salvation of Christmas. Advent is not the long prelude to the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Advent

provides the life giving context for the celebration of God becoming human. Without Advent, Christmas becomes an annual cultural festival which boosts our spirits for a while and then like the aftermath of a sugar high leads us to feel depleted and looking for the next cultural event to help us pass the time. Without Advent, Christmas becomes a time to mark the passage of time. As Dickens' Scrooge expressed, "What is Christmas but a time to find ourselves a year older and not a penny richer." Without Advent, Christmas becomes a time when those of us who struggle this time of year feel oppressed by all the external pressure to join into the season. We feel left out. We miss those who are not with us. We wonder if we can find any comfort and joy in what is the darkest time of the year.

But the season of Advent *redeems* Christmas and opens the door for hope for we who follow the path of Jesus and who seek to find him especially in this emotionally and spiritually complicated season.

The good news is this: Advent is not so much about our seeking God in Jesus. Advent is about God in Jesus *seeking us!* Yes there is much in this season that is dark and feels like wandering in wilderness. But the great news is that *God is looking for us!* God is looking for *you*. God is looking for you as a mother or father looks for a lost child. God is looking for you to find you in your own personal wilderness. God is looking for humanity in this wilderness world of fear, anger, grief, greed and violence. The message of Advent is that not only is God to find you and me in our darkness; God is seeking to restore our world to the peace of his love for all creation.

Let's go back to the passage from Luke. Luke begins by setting the historical and political stage. He does this because Luke wants us to know that the God who looks for us does so in the context of human history. These events take place during the rule of real

people in real places. God does not operate in some spiritual vacuum. God works in and through human history, in and through real people.

Having set the large stage, Luke focuses in on one individual. A man named John son of the priest Zechariah. John's message is simple: God is coming! The God who is looking to find humanity with love is coming.

The entire message of John rests on the conviction that, independent of any human activity, God has chosen this moment in time to be revealed among people. We cannot stop him from coming. We are entirely powerless to control how and when he will appear. But, John says we can do *something*. We can respond to the news that God is coming by believing that what John is announcing is in fact *true*. God is indeed looking *for us*. God wants to *find* us. Like the father of the prodigal son, God yearns to restore us to the joy of full relationship with him.

If we believe that God is looking for us then there is something else we can do. We can begin to live as people who are *not* hopelessly lost. We can begin to live as people for whom God is looking.

Friends, I propose this is a model of living in hope. We do a lot of wandering in life, but we do not give up because we trust we will find what we are seeking eventually. From a spiritual perspective, we believe that is we are patient and wait in hope we will be found and find peace.

How often when we were children were we told by our parents, "If you get separated from me, stay where you are. We will find you"? To me this illustrates the hope of Advent. We are not meant to run around looking for God in an attempt to help God find us. Instead we are called to stop and stay and wait. When I say this I mean stopping *physically*. It is

essential to being found by God that we be still. This is what the writer of Psalm 46 means when he writes, “Be still and know that I am God.” (v.10) We have to *stop* and become *still* and then we are prepared to be found by the God who is looking for us.

In Advent we are people of hope because in one way or another we have been found by God through his son, Jesus. Yet we also know that there is still a lot of wilderness in our lives. We still, and maybe acutely at this time of year feel like the child lost in the department store. We find ourselves wandering around, or even rushing around in a vain attempt to be restored to love, peace and security. Yet when we stop, we wonder, will we be found? This is a very real and tender question. The Service of Light this Wednesday evening is for just you and me who wonder, “Is it really true that God is looking *for us*?” To come to such a service is not to admit failure or weakness. It is an act of faith! After all isn't it amazing that our path of faith leads us to come to find comfort in God's presence? Isn't wonderful that God has designed us to seek his presence when we are in the wilderness of life? Isn't even more astounding that God has designed us in such a way that the easiest way to find him is to stop long enough *to be found by him*?

This morning I invite you to practice being hopeful. By this I do not mean to pretend that you are happy when you are not. I mean to trust that no matter how dark and cold and impersonal life feels and no matter how lost you feel, God is looking for you in order to lift you into his arms in a welcoming embrace. He has sent Jesus so that you will recognize him. Can you, right here and right now accept the amazing fact that God is here. God has brought you *here* in order that you may recognize that you *are found!* You may wander in life; but you are not lost.