

Pastor T.C. Arnold
4th Sunday in Advent
Deuteronomy 18:15-19
December 20th, 2015

Teaching children the Word of God brings joy to a pastor's heart. Last week when I did chapel for our Pre-Kindergarten children I brought that Advent Wreath down to the front here, I lit a candle and ask, "Is the Advent Wreath very bright?" "No," they answered. I lit another candle and asked the same question, "Is the Advent Wreath very bright now?" "No," they answered. I then lit the third candle and asked, "Is the Advent Wreath getting brighter?" They, very correctly said, "Yes!" I lit the last candle, like we have it lit this last Sunday in Advent, and asked about the brightness of the wreath. They said, "Yes, it is bright now."

Then, the most important questions for the kids came before them. I said, "The Advent Wreath is bright so that now we can see a very important person. Who is that person?" "Jesus" they all answered. Yes, it is Jesus. "Who is called the light of the world," I asked? "Jesus," they answered. "And who is it that is born in Bethlehem on Christmas?" "Jesus," they said once again. Pastor it seems as though the answer is always Jesus. Well, yes, that is correct. The answer is always Jesus.

If you happen to listen to Moses in the Old Testament text appointed for today, Deuteronomy 18, you will notice that he does the same thing as the children at Pre-K chapel. His answer is Jesus. "*The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – it is to him you shall listen...*"

And then, it's not just Moses. It's also Isaiah whose answer is Jesus, "*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel*" (which means, God with us). The answer is Jesus for Jeremiah as well when he says, "*In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.*" The answer was Jesus for the prophet Micah when he said, "*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth from me one who is to be ruler in Israel.*" Even John the Baptizer answers Jesus in the Gospel text for today as he denies being the Christ when he says, "*I am not the Christ...I am not Elijah...I'm not the prophet... I AM the voice of the one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'*" In other words, "Hear my voice and see with your eyes – Jesus." He is the answer. From Moses to our Pre-K Children, they know what the answer is. They know WHO the answer is.

And though the prophets knew it, the kids in our school know it, and we know it, we live in a world that doesn't seem to know what the answer is. But there is a wrinkle in all this. We might wonder what the world's question actually is. The world's questions are not about Advent Wreaths getting brighter. The world's questions are not about Angels singing, shepherd's watching, Magi visiting or a baby born in a cattle stall. The world has different questions that require complex answers. These questions cause our hearts to sink into our stomach, our head to hurt and body to shake. These questions don't have ready answers because one might say the right answer is "this" or the correct answer is instead "that." We live in a confused world, we have confused lives and the answer to paying the bills, the answer to worry, the answer to better health, and the answer to our deepest fears we know cannot be as simple as Jesus.

We are not that naïve as Christians, are we? When someone asks, "what am I going to do about my broken relationships?" Is the answer, Jesus? When we hear, "How will my family survive the terrible anxiety we are under right now? Is the answer, Jesus? In prosperity and

poverty, in sickness and in health, in life and in death, how will we manage? Is the answer, Jesus? The short answer is, yes!

Beloved, it was sin that broke apart the perfection that God created. Sin that came from man's heart – man who thought He knew better than God, who thought he wanted to be able to see what only God could see. We go all the way back to the Garden of Eden to see why we live in such a messed up world.

And our own hearts, filled with sin, continue us down a dangerous path when God is set aside, when we quiet His Word for our lives, when we seek all kinds of answers other than the best answer – Jesus. We think, this is too simple of an answer. It can't be right. We can't just answer Jesus for everything because our problems are too big. I have to go out on my own and find other means. Our heart takes us wayward, often making things worse, when we believe the real complicated issues that we deal with on a daily basis can be handled by telling one more little lie, by hiding the truth from a loved one, by scheming and plotting to get what we want. Jesus can't handle these issues. Jesus is not the answer. As a matter of fact, when the going got tough for me, it seemed as if Jesus was the last person in my life to even care. So if He doesn't care, then why should I? Our sinful hearts say Jesus is not the answer.

Yes, life's problems are complicated. But beloved, do not complicate them further by looking for answers that will only disappoint you. When our Lord is silent during our trials and tribulations, it doesn't mean He is not hearing us, does not care about us, or loves to see us suffer. No, rather, His divine plan is revealed to us in His good time. That's hard for us. Because, in the meantime, we are often languishing with some sort of pain we would like to dispel right away. But often, that cannot happen. We go back to that "living in a world filled with sin," thing that Adam and Eve brought about for us back in the Garden.

Here we are, four days away from Christmas Eve. Why will we do so much celebrating? Because of the presents and the food? Because we have family coming into town? No, because of the gift – The Savior is born. Because of those blessed announcements from the Angel Gabriel to Zechariah and Mary, because of a prophet leaping for joy in his mother's womb, because of that same prophet announcing that the Lord has come in the desert, because when that same prophet announces in the desert, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," he is saying, "Look here, world, here is your answer. Here is your Savior, here is everything you will ever want and need!" And like John did in the gospel text for today, he denies being the answer, and rather points to the answer for the sake of the world.

The world needs light to scatter the darkness and the bright Advent Wreath helps us to visualize that today. We can see the answer – the work of our Savior Jesus who was born into a dark world, lived in the midst of the darkness, died on a dark day we call "Good" – when the sun stood still – and accomplished our life through the shedding of His blood. The answer rose to new life on that Easter day and continues to show the light of Christ through the Word today. Ultimately the answer is Jesus for all things.

And so, as we plot through this life, keep before you the light of Christ. His love when we speak to others. His promise when our days are filled with gloom. His life that is ours. Our children know the answer. We know the answer. The answer is Jesus. For soon, "unto us a child is born." His name is Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.