

December 22, 2024

Fourth Sunday in Advent

“Humble, Hidden Places”

Luke 1:39-45

Advent means “appearing” or “revealing” and of course in this season we focus on Christ’s appearing 2000 years ago in the past and maybe more so highlight His coming in glory in our future. But especially in times of hardship, pain and loss our prayer is for Jesus to be with us right now, taking care of whatever the problem is, preferably in the way we desire Him to do so.

Sometimes it’s about physical healing; we want Jesus to intervene and restore our bodies from the disease that’s destroying it—to relieve our pain, maybe even to restore the vigor of our youth. Sometime it’s about relationships—we want Jesus to come and repair our marriage, remove the stubbornness and grudges that have fragmented a family, put an end to the loneliness. Other times it’s about accomplishments—“Jesus come and give me success in business, school, career” or some such thing. Other times it’s about guidance and comfort, “Jesus, come and show me where you want me to go in life; take away my anxiousness and anger; give me peace; strengthen my faith.”

We want big, effective action. We want visible change. We want Jesus’ presence in a big way that shows.

Today I want to reassure you that Jesus is with you in such times, at all times. But I also want to point out that we’re still waiting for Him to come in the big way that shows—His coming in the clouds with great glory.

How should we expect Jesus to come to us in our lives now? Look how hidden and humble Jesus’ arrival in Mary’s womb is. An angel privately clues her in to the program and leaves. In our reading today she travels to some unnamed town in Judea and the rejoicing between her and Elizabeth is private, hidden. John the Baptist leaps with joy while hidden in Elizabeth’s belly. There is no show and fanfare.

Later Jesus is born in a stable in Bethlehem—not the majestic royal city of Jerusalem. Micah calls Bethlehem “*too little to be among the clans of Judah.*” It’s nowheresville. Nobody thinks much of Bethlehem. Nothing showy in Jesus’ upbringing. In fact, that upbringing takes place in Nazareth—a place so backwater that one of Christ’s disciples makes fun of it.

When Jesus begins His earthly ministry, okay, there’s some show at His baptism, I’ll grant you that. But even that seems to be hidden except from a chosen few who perceive what is happening, possibly only Jesus and John comprehend. The rest of the time, yes there are the miracles and the crowds; but Jesus is still just a freakshow itinerant rabbi leading a ragtag group of disciples in the countryside. Jesus never attempts to publicly come across as grandiose and powerful. The one single time Jesus shines in His glory, it’s on top of a mountain with only three or the twelve disciples, and afterward He says they can’t tell anyone about it.

His glorious work of salvation is hidden under torture, suffering on a cross and death. Israel wanted their Messiah to come in a show of great might and strength and raise them to greatness in the eyes of the whole world. Jesus saved the world from its sin, and most of the world didn’t even notice.

And what has always blown my mind is that even after He is raised from the dead, victorious over all enemies—His and ours—He still doesn’t make a great show of things. He makes His appearances looking as He always did—plus the scars of course—and not to the

world but only to believers. There is no visible great change from before He came to when He is gone. Then He makes His exit to the Father's right hand...again, not before a crowd, unnoticed by all but His followers.

Christ's presence in the broken world was and is in humble, hidden ways, not for show. Thus we follow Him by faith, not by sight. But He is always present, doing His Gospel work for you.

Of course, you know the tangible formal ways He gifts forgiveness, life and salvation—the absolution, Holy Baptism, the Holy Supper. These are wonderful and are solid guarantees of salvation to those who receive them in faith—sure comfort indeed.

But today I want to assure you that Jesus is with you in the humble, hidden places of your life even if it doesn't show in works and wonders that would be impressive to the world.

Jesus is there with deliverance as you face decay, disease and the approach of physical death to this life. He has been through the suffering and the dying...and though there was no spectacle made plain to the world, He rose in victory to give you the same victory. He is with you in the strife of broken relationships, encouraging patience and forgiveness as He continues to bear with this fallen world's sinners in love.

He's there with you as you fulfill your various callings in life, not making all things work out as you desire, but assuring you all of it works out for good for those who love God. He is there in your spiritual struggles with sin, impatience, frustration, anxiousness, anger and sadness, assuring you that you stand forgiven and that this too, shall pass, and all things will one day be made right—yourself included.

Do you see Him doing this? No. But that doesn't surprise us. Jesus never promised to come in signs and wonders. As a matter of fact, He warned us to beware of anyone claiming to be Him with signs and wonders! Jesus comes to us in promise. Since the cross and empty tomb Jesus comes to us in promise already fulfilled and guaranteed. And this promise stands, especially in the challenges and brokenness of this world. This promise stands in the humble, hidden, sometimes very dark places of our lives.

So especially at this time of year when, somewhat ironically, so many people feel stressed, anxious, isolated and alone, I want to reassure you that the Prince of Peace is true to His Word, "I will be with you always, to the end of the age." Yes, He's hidden. This has pretty much been His modus operandi from the beginning. But in the hidden He was always doing His work of living a perfect life in our stead and ultimately hiding our sin and death in His own tomb forever. He is still at work now, hidden in words, water, bread, wine, and also within the heart of you, His redeemed people.

He is hidden, but He is promise guaranteed. *"And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace."*

He is here now and always for you. Hold onto His Word. Hold onto His promise. You are not alone, and He is your comfort, your peace. For now, perhaps that is kind of hidden. But the big show and glory, that's on the way. Dwell securely with the hidden Christ and wait for His coming.

Amen.