

Sunday, December 19, 2021
The Fourth Sunday in Advent
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What Then Shall I Do?

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Well, this advent season we have spent the last two weeks looking at John the Baptist and his answering of the question, (“What then shall we do?”) as it was put to him by the tax collectors and by the soldiers who had come out to see him. We heard in the first week that John's response was to share their wealth, to honor the trust that was given them in their positions of authority, and then not to abuse the power that they had with those positions.

Last week, we took it the next step, to what then shall we do with our salvation? Since we know that we have been saved by Christ. And we saw that we are to rejoice in the Lord always, that we're to let our reasonableness be known to everyone around us, and we're not to be anxious about anything. Instead, we are to pray, reflect on those things, think on these things, and then put them into action.

This week, we continue with the John the Baptist theme, but we rewind. We go way back to the beginning, to the time where in our gospel this morning Mary goes to her relative Elizabeth. When she greets Elizabeth, we read he (the baby John the Baptist) leaped for joy in his mother's womb. I'd like you to balance that please with the words of well, the senator from California Dianne Feinstein, who just over a week ago said, “a fetus is not a human being.”

I cannot help but address that right now with this passage. I'd like you to consider what she says. Consider what happens here in our gospel and then apply the word, scripture to it. Words like the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:5 “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I sanctified you.” This is what God is saying to Jeremiah. ‘Before you were born, I set you apart to be a prophet. I knew you before you even born.’ What's that say about a baby in a mother's womb? And then Psalm 139:6-7 “For you formed my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I will give thanks

to you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” What is in the womb? That which God has knit together. And it is fearfully and wonderfully made.

Here you have the baby, John the Baptist, in his mother's womb leaping for joy. Joy is an emotion and I'd like you to consider where we have put emotion in today's standard of importance. A person feels they have an emotion and that ranks at the very top. If it's a guy thinking he's a girl, that emotion rules. Here we have a baby, talk about emotion, leaping for joy. I cannot help but read this and be reminded that abortion is murder because that young baby in a mother's womb is well known by God, knit together by Him, and set apart by Him for His work.

Second, I want you to think about the Angel and the message the Angel gave to Zechariah concerning John the Baptist. First that he would not have any wine or strong drink, but secondly; and listen carefully to this. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. Wow! That says something about the Holy Spirit, doesn't it? The Holy Spirit can, because He's Almighty God, and does work in the unborn, and in the new-born. And again, I cannot help but draw that parallel then to infant baptism. It is so much more than just a symbolic gesture. It is so much more than, I accepted Jesus into my heart. Baptism, as Peter tells us in the Pentecost sermon is where the Holy Spirit comes to us even in an infant because he told everyone to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Repentance and forgiveness and you will receive the Holy Spirit. Baptism brings the Holy Spirit.

Now when you take those first two points put them together, you see the third point very quickly. John was knit together, sanctified, set apart to be a servant of the Lord and he did a pretty good job. Consider what Jesus said about him; “Among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist.” Why? Well, obviously because John answered the question, (What then shall we do?) put to him by the tax collectors and the soldiers. But more than just that, John answered the bigger, personal question, (What then shall I do?). And he heralded the coming of the Messiah. He understood the concept of Psalm 40, which we read in our responsive introit this morning. That which is quoted in our New Testament reading from Hebrews 10 this morning. “Behold I have come to do your will, oh God.” And it's answering the question, (What then shall I do?) I have come to do your will, oh God. Now

who wrote this? King David did. Wait a minute, King David wrote this? Yeah, that's the context here. King David wrote this hundreds of years before Jesus, quoting what the Messiah was going to be saying. "Behold I've come to do your will, oh Lord."

Now what's the rest of the story? What is that will? Well, it starts out very uniquely. Hebrews 10:1 "The Law was but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities." A shadow, the author to the Hebrews is playing off of a concept introduced in the 23rd Psalm. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." Why a shadow? Because a shadow is not the form, the body, whatever it is that the light is hitting, and that object, that body absorbs the light and therefore there's no light on the ground behind it. It's the shadow. But is that shadow the object? No, consider how that plays into the 23rd Psalm. King David was trapped in a cave surrounded by the Israelite army. King Saul was in charge of that army and was going to send them in and kill King David that night, or the following morning. And this is when David writes; "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, it sure looked like he was going to die; but he said, that's not death. It's a shadow of death, that looks like death but what is real? What is the reality? I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever. He introduces us to a beautiful concept. When a person's body dies, it's a shadow. It looks like it's dead, but no. No, the person is alive. If their faith and hope is in God, and his plan of salvation, Jesus, then you dwell in the House of the Lord forever. That's why that is quoted at funerals so often. It's a wonderful message.

But here now the author to the Hebrews is using that same idea, the Law is but a shadow of the good things to come, instead of the true form of these realities. So, what did that shadow look like? What did the Law look like? Well, there was the daily sacrifices going on in the temple from morning to night. There were the yearly sacrifices for atonement, the sacrifice of the bull for the priest, and the goat for the people, and the sprinkling of the blood. A lot of death, a lot of blood, a lot of sacrifices. So many sacrifices that well, the priest never had the chance to sit down. He just was sacrificing all day long and the sacrifices had to keep on going because the sacrifices were never complete. Because as soon as you made a sacrifice for atonement, you go out and you'd sin again. And oh gosh, I have got to do it again. These were constant reminders, bloody reminders, of sin. But they never did the job

because the author to the Hebrews says, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” Consequently, when Christ came into the world He said; and now he quotes Psalm 40. Jesus said, “sacrifices and offerings you God have not desired.” What did God desire? Well, He created Eden, so that He could walk with us in the garden of Eden. That is what He desired. He created us to live. He created creation for life, not for the sacrifices. And then He goes on; “But you God have prepared for me a body, you have created a body.” Think about that in burnt offerings, and sin offerings you've taken no pleasure. In all those sacrifices, there's death. Death of God's creation, the bull, the goat, the lambs of the Passover. That's not what He created them for. He created them to live. And every one of those sacrifices, while reminding us of our sin, it hurts God to see His creation dying.

What is Jesus's response to God preparing the body for him? “Then I said, behold I have come to do your will, oh God.” God's will, what is it? Well one, Jesus had to step into that body and fulfill every one of the prophecies about Him. He did. Second, He had to address that issue of; there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood. And since the blood of the goats and the bulls couldn't do it, He took that body, the body of the Son of God, and He paid the price of the sin and removed sin from us. And with that the relationship with God is restored so that we can walk with Him for eternity, which means God created our bodies to live. But he prepared that body for His only begotten Son; He prepared that body for death. Death so that ours might live again. And what's really big, and I wish I had drum here to do a drumroll. It was Christ's will to step into that body, be confined to that space, and fulfill His Father's will.

And so, we read in Hebrews 10:10 “And by that will, the will of God the Father, and the will of God the Son stepping into that body; “by that will we have been sanctified, set apart through His offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” This is our Advent message, our Christmas present, the ultimate Christmas present! What about Jesus? What did He get out of it? Hebrews 10:21 “He sat down at the right hand of God.” Unlike the priests who had to be offering sacrifices day in, day out, every day of the year, because the blood of goats and the bulls does not achieve forgiveness. When Christ sacrificed that body prepared for Him, He did it! He finished it. When He said it is finished, He wasn't kidding. He made full payment for our sins. He ascended into heaven, and He sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty.

Because it's done, He has nothing more to do other than to come home and take us home.

And so, this Advent, we asked the question, What shall I do? John the Baptist, I'm sure he asked that question. He got the work, he was out there, the voice in the wilderness crying, "prepare the way of the Lord. Jesus had the body prepared for Him. He stepped into it. He did what He was supposed to do. What shall I do? God's will. And what is His will? Well, everything we've talked about so far.

Now I want to just bring it really home, the one thing more, we talked about it last week a little bit. But it's a thing that the priests couldn't do, prophets couldn't do, the children of Israel really couldn't do, something we can do right now. We can first of all, be rejoicing when we sing, "Oh come, All Ye Faithful, joyful and triumphant." We can come here to church joyful and triumphant because Christ has done it. And we can come all you faithful to His communion table, and commune with Him right here, right now, a little bit of Eden restored on earth as we walk with Him and He walks with us, bringing us that joy, bringing us that forgiveness of sins. Because He answered the question, (What shall I do?) He would do His Father's will and save us.

In our Saviors' Name, Amen