
What Then Should We Do?

**An Evensong meditation by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell
Advent 2 – Year C**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart find favor in your sight oh Lord. My strength and my Redeemer. Amen.

We had an amazing crowd at the Cathedral yesterday. I came early. The parking lot was already full. The farmer's market was abuzz with joyous shopping. The parking lot was crowded as normal because everybody's waiting for that spot closest to the entrance. As I made my way into the atrium, the Atlanta Gay Men's Chorus was already gathering there, many in their festive red vests. They would have not one but two concerts later in the day. I made my way to the atrium and there were kids just buzzing about, each being outfitted for their costumes in our children's pageant, which is being filmed this year.

And as I walked into the nave, they told me I couldn't come in here because there was a practice going on. And then there was later a funeral in the Memorial Garden. So within the space of an hour, if you just stood in the Horseshoe Drive, you could hear both the theme from Star Wars, with fourth graders pounding on the walkway there, all in their helmets and swords, and the peal of bells out of our Memorial Garden in thanksgiving and celebration for the life that had passed over.

All of this chaos was going on in the Cathedral and yet in the middle of it, was an Advent quiet day. In the Lanier House, 25 people had gathered for a day of silence and prayer. And somehow, without thinking about it, I became aware that the quiet and the prayer was the center of all of the other excitement. The quiet and the prayer was the seed that had blossomed into the flower which was occupying so much of the rest of the campus. This image of the life at the Cathedral strikes me as being a good image for our own lives. And I think you can see it in our scriptures today. I mean, they're beautiful aren't they? We have the Song of Zachariah with the power and providence of God, and a vision of the world when God's reign is present.

We have this tender letter that Paul writes to his church from prison, recalling their holding him in prayer and him holding them in prayer. And of course the Magnificat, where Mary's voice holds forth with all that will be done to raise up those who have been laid low. And then the beginning of John the Baptist's proclamation that there is a voice crying out in the wilderness. And then John adds five verses that aren't in the other Gospels. "Every valley shall be filled," he says, "every mountain and hill shall be made low and the crooked shall be made straight. The rough ways made smooth and all flesh shall see, all flesh shall see, the salvation of God."

It may makes you want to just stop in gratitude and give thanks for the presence of God which seems so palpable and present in all of these words. And yet in the back of your mind, maybe you like me, have the awareness of what John says next. As the crowd has gathered and John has laid out this wonderful image using Isaiah as his foundation, he then turns to them and says, "You brood of Vipers." You got to think a couple of them are wondering why they were there. "You brood of Vipers," he says, "why have you come here to avoid the wrath of God?" And then unlike other gospels who distinguish between the average person there and the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the good and the bad, the in and the out, John does not do that in Luke.

It is the whole crowd that he's talking to. All of us are the subjects of his advice. And so when the crowd responds, "well, what shall we do?" he is full of answers. He goes through each category of person that is there and tells them how they should change what they're doing. Become a new person, he seems to be saying, be transfigured, he seems to be saying. It's about transformation, not just forgiveness. But how are we to do this? How are we to alter our behavior so that we do everything right?

I don't think we can. And I don't think we ought to try, at least right away. I think that my experience at the Cathedral provides the real answer. At the core, we must learn to be still, to be quiet, to be in solitude. That must become a part of who we are because all of those changes that John is encouraging us to effect are not done by the sweat of our brow or the tensing of our muscles. They are accomplished by our being quiet and still, it's not about the decisions we make. It's about a state of being that we allow God to develop in us. It's about allowing something to rise up in us in that stillness, within our awareness so that God's purpose can shine through. We are in a way like one of these beautiful stained glass windows when the white light of God on the outside, shines through into a beautiful colored pattern.

And that's how his purpose is worked out in the world. This is the season where we practice that stillness, this a season where we practice that poise, that state of being.

I finished my day in a baptism workshop. Families are gathered with their young children. In this case, it went from a child that was two to a child that was 10. COVID has really changed these baptism workshops. But as I went through my introduction exercises, asking each of them, why are you here? What attracted you to the Cathedral? Why this community? the answers from this group who came from all across the country represented almost all socioeconomic classes, had great diversity and gender and sexual orientation. It was the same answer. We came here and were welcomed. We came here and found hospitality. We came here and met people in the beauty of this place and with this music. We met people we wanted to be with. We met people through whom God's purpose shined.

It was an amazing crowd that we had at the Cathedral yesterday and for all of the chaos and all of the attention that will be paid to so many of the elements of that crowd, I want to leave you with the importance of the 25 people gathered at the core, in the Advent quiet day. Their silence, their solitude, their prayers are I think, the place where God's purpose rises up in us and shines through us like a beautiful pattern from those stained glass windows. Amen.