

## **In the Realm of Possibility**

**Nov. 25, 2007**

**Luke 1:67-79**

**A sermon by Joe Hoffman**

This is the last Sunday of the church year – the end of a long season called the Pentecost Season or Ordinary Time. This season always ends on Realm of Christ Sunday – once known as Christ the King Sunday.

Next Sunday is Advent – the time of waiting with expectation and anticipation for God to break into our world again, to come to us again. Today is an ending and next Sunday a new beginning. The circle never ends.

Today the text is the canticle from Zechariah – the father of John the Baptist. He and Elizabeth were righteous, good people – much like Abraham and Sarah. They had gotten to be a bit old, and had never had a child. It was a mark of shame in the eyes of some not to have a child in those days – especially not to have a son. And the blame went to Elizabeth – that something was wrong with her. In reality, it was just a sad situation since they so much wanted a child. They had prayed and hoped, but to no avail.

Zechariah was a priest – and the occasion came for him to go into the Temple alone and offer sacrifice for the people. In this occasion he is encountered by an angel – Gabriel – who says – Do not be afraid. Angels were known in some religious groups to be a messenger of God, and their word was to be taken for truth. The angel tells Zechariah that he and Elizabeth would have a child, and his name would be John. That John would come to prepare the way for the Holy One who was coming soon.

Zechariah questioned the angel – seemingly forgetting that the angel's word was to be known as truth. As a result, Zechariah was struck dumb – he would not again be able to speak until the child was born and named. When he came out of the Temple, people knew that he had had a holy encounter. They could see it in his face, and of course, could tell by his inability to speak. But the news of the angel was thus kept a secret. Something had happened, but no one knew what except for Zechariah.

Finally John is born, and at a public naming ceremony, Elizabeth says that the name of the child will be John. The neighbors question this – this went against custom. But finally Zechariah finds his voice and confirms in a loud voice – the child will be called John. And then Zechariah sings forth this canticle of praise which reveals the calling of John – to prepare the way for the Holy One to come. The canticle continues to point the way to Jesus though, to the one who will come. John's role is very specific

It is a great story – but one we don't hear very much. It is our text today because it points us toward the realm of Christ. John came to prepare the way. The focus is on God's future. John was to help people see that it was through Jesus that the realm of God would come.

One would think that this is most appropriately an advent text – and yes, it is an advent text. But it is also appropriate for today for it points us toward God's future as well. We are reminded that Jesus came to teach a new way. Not that we will have an earthly king who will save us. But that we have what we need through what Jesus has shown us.

In Jesus we find a model for the realm of God. We find a way for healing, a way for loving. We experience the gift of grace, the presence of peace, the joy of community. We find the beginning of the rest of our lives.

God did not come through the power structure of that time. God chose to bring us a way that did not exclude or marginalize. God came to those who had been marginalized. God came amidst the ordinary to bring us hope.

God came to two older people who lived good lives and tried to be faithful.  
God came to two younger people who were mostly unknown.  
God brought birth amidst a season of counting and preparation for paying taxes.  
God brought forth new life in the midst of shepherds and livestock.

And Jesus walked with the marginalized and the outcast. He never fit in with the establishment. He lived on the edge of the tradition.

The realm of Christ comes when we do the same. When we trust in God's future. When we see the coming of God in ordinary events. When we are open to the presence of Christ in our neighbor. It will not be a once and forever experience. It will come here and there. It comes as we open ourselves to the power of the possibility. It comes as we are ready and able to bring it forth with our own gifts and talents.

When we had our capital campaign 4 or more years ago, we pledged over \$1 million – from a group of about 200 people, most of whom had middle incomes – working for non profits, or teaching in school, social workers, lots of retired clergy. Not many people with a lot of financial resources. The campaign consultant thought our goal was too high – but we insisted. And we exceeded what we thought we could do. What was going on with that? I think we trusted in God's future. I think we knew that God would not call us to something we couldn't do. God gives us what we need. We had enough.

We still have enough. We have all we need to go forth into the new year with plenty of financial resources to do what God invites us to do. To be a place of grace. To be a people of peace. To find joy in our work for justice. To find healing in our hope.

We bring our gifts to each other. We have a piece of what is needed for the realm of Christ to break forth a little more. John came to prepare the way for what was possible. Jesus came to live that possibility. We are called to continue to do the same.

It is with joy that we sing our praise. It is with faith that we baptize Cooper today – to join us in this journey towards God’s promised peace. We are not promised that trouble will never come. Indeed, trouble has plagued us all our lives. But that is the human reality. We are promised that there is a way. A way to live in the presence of God’s holy passion and to know the deep joy of that covenant.

Today we come to the end of the ordinary season. Next week we begin again a season of longing and waiting. It is a circle that never ends. But it is within the realm of God’s possibility that we live each day, that we remember that we are not alone, that we take on our troubles with hope.

We have what we need. We live in the realm of God’s possibility. Thanks be to God.  
Amen.