

**December 13, 2009 – the Third Sunday of Advent**

**The Reverend Canon Robert G. Riegel**

**Luke 3:7-18**

I am sure that you know that on Saturday Andrew Waldo was elected to be the eighth bishop of the Diocese of Upper South Carolina. Assuming that his election will be approved by both a majority of bishops and a majority of Standing Committees of our church he will be consecrated on May 22 at a place of his choosing – perhaps in the restored cathedral. I expect that Andrew will be an excellent bishop. The process of electing a bishop is often very difficult for a diocese and certainly a strain on the candidates. Computers and the internet allow many Emails and blogs to be written with a mixture of truth and untruth and many with a spirit of meanness and lack of charity. We must pray for healing and unity in our diocese so that we may do that work to which God calls us. Philip Linder would have made a fine bishop, but I am really thankful that he will continue his excellent ministry as dean of the cathedral. But this has been a difficult few months. Please keep him, and the cathedral, and the diocese in your prayers.

Meanwhile, what are we to do? St. Paul is clear in saying that the duty of all Christians is to Rejoice – rejoice in the Lord always. There are always things happening in the world and in the church that cause us anxiety and dismay. Christians are called, not to live in fear or anger, but to live in rejoicing for what God has done and is doing for us and for our salvation. Saint Paul urges that our gentleness be known to everyone. The world is hungering for gentleness and kindness. Studies show that kindness is the most essential ingredient for good and lasting marriages. Am I naïve to believe that we can disagree about things without condemnation and anger. Cannot we in our political life and church life and family life learn to respect others and speak to others with gentleness and kindness. (I

have to admit that John the Baptist in our Gospel is not a good example of gentleness.) Then Paul says the theme for all Advent. The Lord is near. Stop worrying about anything but let your prayers and thanksgivings be made known to God. And then Paul gives us that wonderful promise to those who rejoice in the Lord. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

St. Luke pictures John the Baptist as the last of the great Old Testament prophets. Luke sees history as two great acts of Salvation. The Salvation history of the Old Testament that ends with John and emphasizes law and repentance. The second part of Salvation history is in the life of Jesus and the life of the Church and here the emphasis is on God's unconditional love and our call to rejoice and be thankful to God and act toward others with love and gentleness and kindness. John was clear that he was not the savior, but just as clear that his job was to point to the savior. And pointing is our job.

Several years ago I enjoyed a comedian. I don't remember his name nor much of his routine. One thing he did made a strong impression. Every now and then he would stop and point at someone in the audience. For a while he would just point and look and then he would say, "I like you." I think people experienced both some discomfort and delight.

So I want to encourage you to point to someone. I know that goes against what my mother taught me. Never point at anyone. So let John, the most important pointer in the Bible, be a model for us – for us to learn to point and say "I like you." and "Jesus loves you" and Rejoice in the Lord always.