

Sermon – 12/16/18
“Advent Meditation”
Various
3rd Sunday of Advent

Davidson College Presbyterian Church – Davidson, NC
The Rev. Robert M. Alexander

The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Philippians, quoted what many scholars believe was a hymn of the early church. “He humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is LORD.”

The Name that is above every name – Jesus, Messiah, anointed one, promised one, holy one, who came in the fullness of time – a light in the darkness, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, the bread of life.

I wonder what it was like for Mary on that first Christmas morning to look into the eyes of her beautiful new baby boy and to call his name for the first time – “Jesus, Iesu, Yeshua! My little boy.” According to Luke – Mary had been told by the angel Gabriel that her son would be called “the Son of the Most High” and that he would be given the throne of his ancestor David. According to Matthew - Joseph had been told in a dream that the child was to be named Jesus because “he would save his people from their sins.” Matthew interpreted the prophecy of Isaiah as having been fulfilled in Jesus – “a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall name him Emmanuel.” This means – God with us.

So much power, so much meaning, so much significance ... in a name. And those who have called upon this name throughout the centuries have tried to walk in the way of life of which it spoke. In Jesus the Kingdom of God had come near. The Kingdom of love and light was at hand. Justice, righteousness, healing, wholeness, compassion, mercy, kindness, and love have been made real – in flesh and blood - in this child born over 2000 years ago. And yet we still long for his Advent. We still wait and watch for these gifts to be realized among us.

This past Sunday, a whopping 38 of us gathered for worship in the chancel of the Sanctuary on a snowy and icy morning. We sang together “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” One line from the hymn sings “the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.” Jesus was born in Bethlehem, fulfilling the promise made long before and satisfying the longing of an aching creation for wisdom, redemption, deliverance, freedom, hope, promise, light, peace, unity, goodness, truth, beauty, grace, and love. This is the life which Jesus embodies and when we call upon his name, these are the hopes that we have for our own lives and for our world.

In whatever little town we may find ourselves, whether Bethlehem, or Davidson, or otherwise, when we call upon the name of Jesus, the scriptures declare that we will be saved. Now - I am sure that salvation occurs in an eternal – other-worldly sort of way. But I wonder if sometimes we miss the more immediate very worldly salvation and transformation that is possible when we truly open ourselves to this One who lights the darkness.

We are not the only one’s calling after all. Let’s not forget that Jesus Christ, the good shepherd, is also calling us. God has come near to us in Jesus Christ and calls our name as well. (**Look out and name people in the Congregation**) When we hear our own names, we respond to that calling and choose another path. We choose to walk in light. We choose to walk in love. We choose to walk

in gentleness and generosity and kindness and patience. And we trust that this one who gave himself for the sake of the world will guide us, equip us, empower us and will not abandon his creation which he has redeemed, but will remain steadfast until all has been made whole, reconciled, and set free. This kind of name-calling can lead to faithful following.

When we call out for God – “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” – we express our longing for the Lord of all creation to come and set things right in the world. So let us not forget that begins with you and with me. Where is God working in each one of us to realize the Kingdom of love and light? Call upon the name of Jesus, and be prepared to be transformed as your name is called to come and follow.

So when we find ourselves longing for something this Advent and Christmas season may we join with our brothers and sisters across the globe and throughout the centuries who have called on the name of Jesus, trusting that all their hopes and fears would be met and satisfied in him. And as we call upon the Name that is above every name, may we be open to the call upon our own lives to be made whole, reconciled, and set free.

To God be the Glory! Amen!