

Sunday December 5, 2021
First Lesson Malachi 3: 1-4
Gospel Lesson: Luke 3: 1-6
Sermon Series: Holy Renovation

KJ Journal Thursday December 2, 2021:

I can't believe how amazing yesterday was, at our First Advent Midweek class at the Church. Every one seemed pleasantly surprised and slightly overwhelmed with how overjoyed I was when they walked in the room. There were moments where I literally squealed out people's names and hugged people as they were walking in. Geesh, I hope they come back!

I just couldn't contain myself because not to dwell on this pandemic that we are in; all I can say is that my soul needed to see people. My heart longed to converse with people beyond the Sunday morning hellos and how are you's. My spirit longed to converse with people who may be feeling some of

what I have been feeling; feelings that I am still trying to name....let's just say that the world that we are in is so different from the world that I grew up in.

For example, learning about the recent Michigan High School shooting incident; as I reflect growing up and going to elementary school and Junior High School in Brooklyn NY and then attending High School for a couple of years in Harlem NY before relocating to Winfield KS, I never felt like I had to worry about my personal safety. I cannot imagine what that community and other communities who have experienced similar tragedies are going through.

In fact, growing up, it was very easy for me to see the beauty of the world and most importantly the beauty within people. Yes, as a child, I got teased for being nerdy and an overachiever in school. For in Brooklyn NY during those times, where most kids was sporting their Guess jeans and Champion

sweatshirts; my mother and myself had other plans for what my attire would be. For my mom was a fabulous seamstress and she would sew my own clothes. Even back then, I just knew I was born to be in someone's fashion magazine.

So my mom would make me A-line cut dresses; I would wear bows in my hair and hats when I was outside; since I could not wear my hats inside the school. I would read my Babysitter club books or Judy Blume books in my spare time. I was the kid that was very excited about school and won lots of awards for spelling bee contests and story telling contests; contests where I would have to memorize an entire story and tell it before judges and other students. I was pretty good at it too.

So although I got teased from some kids for being different and somewhat eccentric; it really didn't bother me. For the positive and encouraging messages that came from my parents and family

and members of my community were enough to drown out any voices of negativity that may come my way.

I am striving to get back to this same place in 2021, where I can still find the beauty in the world and in other people. And you know what...I think now I can name what was so magical about the class last night! For the first time, in a long time, I re-discovered the power of community similar to that of my own childhood. Last night, we were able to carve out just a little bit of time to share with one another; to listen to one another's personal stories. The best part of the evening for me was witnessing people meeting one another for the very first time; not to mention it was very intergenerational and diverse in many ways.

So my "aha" moment is that although we are in a world that may feel so isolating for a myriad of reasons, we can still find those beautiful moments;

like perhaps when we were a child. We can rediscover a passion for life in community that could provide the necessary level of resilience necessary to help us get through whatever nightmare we are in as a collective world. Perhaps, if we can get back to recreating these types of spaces of community with positive messaging that focuses on community building; perhaps this is one step towards resetting us back to the days where when we send our children off to school, we can be assured that they will return safely.

For now, I am grateful for a renewed perspective.

KJ

- Another excerpt from my personal journal for your personal reflection as we continue on in our Holy Renovation series.

- And so as I take in the words of Malachi for our first lesson and look at the gospel of Luke 3 for our gospel in our lectionary calendar, there is a theme that I am seeing emerge from the scriptures that I gleaned upon in my journal entry; that I feel is at the core of this series I have been preaching over the past two weeks—and that is this theme of **messaging**.
- In the first lesson of Malachi, the first portion of the sentence opens up with saying in verse 1: “ See I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me....
- In the gospel of Luke 3:1-6, the gospel does not use the word message or messenger, but nevertheless when it says in Luke 3:2b,” the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness,”
- Then if we jump down to verse 4 b-c; where the words from the prophet Isaiah; “ the voice of one

crying out in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight...”; which came from the voice of John; son of Zechariah in the wilderness;

- I would submit that what we are indeed hearing is a message; from a messenger....
- Furthermore, from these two passages of scriptures, as I attempt to make relevant connections for us today, questions that come to my mind immediately is , “what type of messages are we receiving in our world today?”
- “Are we all hearing the same message?”
- Looking at the time period where these two passages were written, I suppose the same questions could have been posed for the people of that day as well;
- “What type of messages were they receiving in their day?”

- Furthermore, “were they hearing the same message?”
- You see, one of the most difficult things for a preacher/teacher and anyone who is tasked to deliver a message; is that sometimes the message is not always understood or well received.
- The old adage that comes to my mind regarding my point is that, “it is not what you say, it is how you say it!”
- And although I still believe in the essence of this adage wholeheartedly; I have discovered that it is much more complex than even this.
- For depending on the messenger’s tone, dialect, background and more; let’s just say a message can get lost in translation.
- So part of why I have been spending so much time in introducing training concepts such as the Process Communication Model; aka PCM (which I will not go into detail but you can look at my written

sermons and preaching videos on our website); is to also raise the awareness that there are other aspects to our communication that can make messaging tricky.

- For we are all different types of learners; we are all different types of listeners...which affects how we communicate.
- We also learned last week, that there are other factors such as when we are in distress; that can affect how you and I receive and process information.
- So my “aha” moment is that it is worth some time for us all to revisit this concept of what it means to be a healthy communicator and furthermore what it means to be in community with one another.
- For there is messaging all around us; messaging that is overwhelming at times;
- There is messaging that is contradicting at times;

- There is messaging that depending on where we are in our own personal lives; can even be painful at times to take in;
- **Making it difficult** for many of us to be able to sit down and really have a productive conversation with one another.
- **Making it difficult** for churches in particular to discern what our messaging needs to be, in a world where the oral culture and tradition has seemingly been replaced with social media, news, politics and more;
- And so for me, the approach as the leader tasked to serve in such a time such as this, is to re-establish the goals of what it means to be a community; and furthermore what does the messaging need to be from this community.
- For there is one message that I am hearing in the world today; that I think is pertinent to name for our

consideration; and that is this promotion of individualism;

- Where individualism is typically focused on the rights and concerns of each person;
- And for me I am seeing this message of individualism especially played out in our culture today; as it pertains to the response to this pandemic;
- And although I do personally value personal rights and freedoms;
- I suppose my narrative subscribes more to this idea of collectivism;
- **Where when we are called** to love our neighbor;
- **When we are called to see** our neighbor;
- **When we are called to** clothe our neighbor;
- **When we are called to** assist our neighbor;
- We do just that...
- But somehow, somewhere, the messaging in my eyes has become quite complex and muddled;

- Leaving the church and its leaders in a very difficult position.
- And so for me when I look back at the scriptures for our reflection today of Malachi and Luke;
- Where the prophet Malachi is inviting us during this Advent season to prepare the Way for the Lord and John the son of Zechariah is delivering essentially the same message;
- I believe the way for the Church of today in the midst of racial dissension, violence, pandemic and political concerns; starts with community;
- And the way **as a community** we begin to prepare the way for Christ's love in our hearts; is by figuring out how we can come together to have conversations that may begin to move these metaphorical mountains of dissension and distress in our lives and our communities;
- **As a community** we must learn how to come together in all of our differences; even in the face

of opposition; to the practice of dialogue, by modeling conversations that allows the opposition to be named and explored.

- **As a community** we must learn that the nature of conversation is the only way we begin to tell the story of redemption, restoration and reconciliation and in doing so; this is how I believe we make our paths straight; as our scriptures invite us to in preparation for when the force of love Jesus returns in all of His magnificent Glory!
- And the good news is that here at First United Methodist Church of Lincoln NE, this past Wednesday has lit a fire in my soul where my heart was strangely warmed; similar to the experience of John Wesley the founder of Methodism and the prophet Jeremiah 20: 12 must have felt;
- Where I realized that there were other hungry souls, yearning to come together again and have this long overdue conversation;

- **There were people** who were ready to have a conversation about why the world is the way it has become and most importantly ready to do something about it;
- **There were people** that understood that misinformation and miscommunication has begun to destroy the foundation of what it means to be community;
- **There were people** that understood the necessity to reclaim these necessary conversations so that our lives together can truly be....together!
- For as in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 reminds us;
- There is one body, but it has many parts. But all its many parts make up one body.
- It is the same with Christ.
- **13** We were all baptized by one Holy Spirit.
- And so we are formed into one body. It didn't matter whether we were Jews or Gentiles, slaves

or free people. We were all given the same Spirit to drink.

- **14** So the body is not made up of just one part. It has many parts.
- **15** Suppose the foot says, “I am not a hand. So I don’t belong to the body.” By saying this, it cannot stop being part of the body.
- **16** And suppose the ear says, “I am not an eye. So I don’t belong to the body.” By saying this, it cannot stop being part of the body.
- **17** If the whole body were an eye, how could it hear? If the whole body were an ear, how could it smell?
- **18** God has placed each part in the body just as he wanted it to be. **19** If all the parts were the same, how could there be a body? **20** As it is, there are many parts. But there is only one body.

- **21** The eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you!" The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you!"
- **22** In fact, it is just the opposite. The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are the ones we can't do without.
- **23** The parts that we think are less important we treat with special honor. The private parts aren't shown. But they are treated with special care.
- **24** The parts that can be shown don't need special care. But God has put together all the parts of the body. And God has given more honor to the parts that didn't have any.
- **25** In that way, the parts of the body will not take sides. **All of them will take care of one another.**
26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part shares in its joy.

- **27** You are the body of Christ....We are the Body of Christ... Each one of us is a part of it.
- And this is the invitation for us to reclaim this day;
- For as a church community, First United Methodist Church of Lincoln Nebraska will continue to create spaces by way of small groups, worship, service and more that will keep these necessary conversations going; that reinforces this very Body the scriptures are naming;
- We will provide safe spaces for us to learn together, share together, grow together, form an unbreakable bond together;
- Until the fire catches hold of us all;
- And we all become that metaphorical bush that Moses saw that day;

- A bush where upon closer inspection, Moses noted that it was ablaze, but it was not consumed...
- And at the core was the voice of God; the voice of Love calling out Moses, Moses!;
- That same voice of Love is calling out to First United Methodist Church of Lincoln NE.....
- And the prayer is that our conversations in the days to come lead us all to say, “Here I am...here we are!”
- Let the Church say Amen and Hallelujah!
- Thanks be to God!

