

The Fear of Home

Come Home for Christmas: Part 2 “The Fear of Home”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – December 5, 2021

2nd Sunday of Advent

Readings: Malachi 3:1-4; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6

Reflection: Luke 1:68-79

Greeting: Glory to God in the highest. And on earth peace, good will toward men! (*Luke 2:14*)

Prayer: O God everlasting, the prophets spoke your word so the path to your salvation could be made known with the message of repentance. Be with us this day and prepare our hearts to receive your love. Strengthen us in faith that we may celebrate the birth of our Savior. Warm our hearts to welcome our Emmanuel, God with us. Let your hope, peace, joy, and love be the light that guide us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Luke 1:68-79

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:68-79 NRSV)*

We read the words of Luke and hear of God’s peace. In this season of Advent, do you seek the path of peace that God shows? In what ways do you seek to follow the call to trust in the Lord? How do you share in the peace of Christ with those around you? What does peace look like in your eyes? How can we come together in love to celebrate God with us? How can we come together to share the light?

Prayer: In this season of preparation, we praise your constant presence in our lives, O Lord. Help us to celebrate the peace that you give to all through your love. Help us to recognize our home with you and may we treat each other as family at your table. May we find hope as we follow our Risen Savior, born into this world to make us free. We raise up our prayers to you this day that you may comfort, guide, and lead us into the light of your love. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Malachi chapter 3 verses 1 through 4.

The See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years. (Malachi 3:1-4 NRSV)*

Our next reading for today comes from Philippians chapter 1 verses 3 through 11.

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God’s grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:3-11 NRSV)*

Our last reading for today comes from Luke chapter 3 verses 1 through 6.

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’” (Luke 21:25-36 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This Sunday we touch on an issue that can be difficult sometimes. Today we talk about the fear of home. Not everyone experiences the same joy thinking about going home for the holidays. Despite what the song says that “there's no place like home for the holidays” sometimes that's not always a good thing. I was reminded again of another Christmas movie that I love, and I've loved since I was a kid, no matter how goofy it is. “Santa Claus: The Movie” is one that I watch every year. And I was reminded of it from today's readings because in it, there is an elf who feels that he has let Santa down. He goes out into the world to try to redeem himself, so that Santa will want him to come home. But with that is his fear of returning. Because it's a fear that comes with reconciliation. “What if I'm not good enough?” It's a fear that we can see reflected in our readings today. We hear it in the words of Malachi. “Who can endure the day of his coming and who can stand when he appears?” Who will ever be good enough to really come home to God? Who will be good enough to respond to the messenger? That John the Baptist stands in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord and make his path straight. Calling for the repentance of sins through baptism. But even that raises the question: “what if I'm not good enough? Is there a place for me at the table? Can I come home?” But we hear a welcome message in the letter to the Philippians. One of constant prayer and thankfulness. Holding those of the church in his heart Paul writes that he keeps them in prayer that their love may overflow. But even there, there's worry. He keeps them in his heart because he wants them to be good. To be pure and blameless. Because there's again that fear of not being good enough.

I think we've all felt that in one way or another. That's one of the reasons that being reconciled to God can be so difficult at times, because even if God loves us, we have a tendency to judge ourselves as unworthy. And we distance ourselves from Christ feeling that we are unworthy to be in his presence. And sometimes we make others feel that way. We make others feel that they can't come home because there is no place for them. Too often we are like the innkeepers of a child's Christmas play, telling Mary and Joseph “there's no room for you here.” We're afraid of reconciliation to each other because of fear that either we won't or they won't measure up. And the problem is that we are the ones always doing the measuring. We are always the ones declaring that we aren't good enough, instead of preparing a way for the Lord, to make his paths straight. We hide around the next corner, worried we're going to be in the way of whoever is proclaiming that message and making the paths straight. Not realizing it too was a message for our lips. Because reconciliation isn't something we should fear, but something we should rejoice over. Because it's Christ who washes us clean. Christ who reconciles us to God. Christ who recognizes our iniquity and forgets it. Christ who invites all to his table, all to come home.

So, this Christmas we do have a choice before us. A choice between fear and love. The fear that we will never be good enough or acceptance that love will make us whole. And if love can make us whole, love can make all whole in Christ. Too often, Christ becomes a dividing

line. Those who are in and those who are out. Instead of being a welcome mat, an open hand at the door, a hug, a handshake, a kiss, a greeting to say “yes, we've been waiting for you.” The choice that is before us is if we accept that love and let that love make us whole so that we can call others home, or to fear that love by thinking that it's not for us or it's not for others. We worry that our love isn't enough, that our best won't do. We confuse how we see each other with how God sees us. Because I don't think Christ sees any of us as beyond hope. I don't think Christ sees any of us but as beyond redemption. I don't think Christ sees any of us as unworthy of love.

So, this Christmas I make the call of peace. “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” Make a path that all may come home, that all may feel welcome, that all may feel loved. That all may know that reconciliation is there. That reconciliation is possible because love is. Because God is not standing there waiting for us to fail. God is there trying to help us succeed in love. God is not there noticing how burdensome we are. God is there helping to lighten the load. God did not come into this world to remind us of what miserable failures we are and that there is no place for us. Christ was born to remind us that there is always a place that we can call home.

But I'll admit, sometimes it's hard not to be afraid. Sometimes it is hard to be at peace. Sometimes it's hard to drive that fear out. Because we do mess up. Sometimes we mess up in such big ways that we don't know how to make it right. But I've got good news for you. Someone does know how to make it right. And it's his birth that we prepare our hearts for. It's his birth that we come together to celebrate this time of year. Because he came to show us the way. Even when we get lost on our own winding and crazy paths, he's there to remind us that there's always a way home. That there's always a way forward. There's always a way to be reconciled. There is always forgiveness. There is always his peace. There is always love.

So let that love be our guide. Let that love call out over and over again. Let that love remind us why we are celebrating. Let that peace settle upon our hearts. Because we are celebrating God with us all. God there for us all, each and every day. And it's this day, Christmas, that reminds us of hope being born into this world. To give us hope everlasting. To give us life. To give us love. To give us peace. So, let us share that hope. Let us share that love freely so that none may fear that they have no place at the table. Let us be a people that show others a place of peace. That we are of one people. We are of one body, redeemed by one blood, that we are of one Savior born to us to give us hope. To bless us with his peace. Always and everywhere, no matter what. In Christ, we find peace because in him we have nothing to fear. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: O Lord, the God who saw fit to walk with us, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions. We know that we fall short, both in what we do and what we fail to do. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead. Help us to proclaim the Good News and to live it. Help us in our weakness and forgive us. May we remember your love and redemption are forever with us, born to call us home. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Come Home for Christmas

Our Advent/Christmas series is *Come Home for Christmas*. Advent is an invitation to celebrate Christ coming into the world, a reminder that God is with us. We celebrate the longing for God's kin-dom, the true home in God we hope for. The invitation for all is this: Come home for Christmas.

November 28th – *Time to Go Home* – Jeremiah 33:14-16; 1 Thess. 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

December 5th – *The Fear of Home* – Malachi 3:1-4; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6

December 12th – *The Joy of Home* – Zephaniah 3:14-20; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

December 19th – *The Blessing of Home* – Micah 5:2-5a; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45

December 24th – *Welcome Home* – Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20

December 26th – *Lost at Home* – 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

January 2nd – *The Light of Home* – Jeremiah 31:7-14; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:-18

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Jodie Bunch	Family of Mike Niebrugge	Gene Laymon	Tom Finley
Family of Martha Hurst	Family of Jeanette Carrell	Jim Nichols	Family of Larry Sappington
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Family of Lowell Cutright	Bonnie Hite	Family of Lavada Markwell
Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte			

Rev Camron D St.Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

cdstmichael@outlook.com

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

* Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

+ Scripture quotations are from the Common English Bible, Copyright © 2011 by Common English Bible.