

3rd Sunday of Advent - 2006 - Year C - Lk 3:10-18

1. Last year it was everywhere.
 - a. In the newspapers.
 - b. On the television,
 - c. People were talking about it, and taking sides.
2. What was it? A war - a war that threatened to destroy those things we hold most sacred.
 - a. . . . no not THAT war.
 - i. The war on terror, with its unholy offspring,
 - ii. the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan which still continue to dominate the news
 - iii. show no signs of going anywhere,
 - (1) save straight to hell in a handbasket.
3. No, I am talking about another war;
 - a. a war that last year it was said was destroying something truly sacred
 - b. It was a war being fought in department stores,
 - c. with reports of clerks being forbidden to say "Merry Christmas"
 - d. With towns, cities and even the White House avoiding the term "Christmas tree" using the bland term, "holiday tree" instead.
 - e. Manger scenes were being removed from town squares,
 - f. Christmas carols from public school concerts,
 - g. any mention of Christ's birth from the holiday season.
 - h. It was the War on Christmas.
4. Tell me . . . what happened to it? Was the war won? And if so which side emerged victorious? And if it is still being waged, why do we not still hear of it?
 - a. Last year's "war on Christmas" says a lot about the way in which certain news organizations "create news" by stringing together isolated incidents in a conspiracy theory-type pattern.
5. And yet, the War on Christmas would have never gained an audience
 - a. if it did not strike some deep chord in many people.
 - i. And I think everyone of us know what that chord is.
 - b. We've known it ever since we were young,
 - i. When the magic and mystery of Christmas
 - (1) faded in the face of adolescent doubt and uncertainty
 - ii. When the joy and excitement of getting gifts at Christmas
 - (1) became the burden of buying them for others.
 - iii. When all the things we call "the spirit of Christmas"
 - (1) somehow became empty of the spirit of Christ.
 - c. It is *Christ* that we are looking for in Christmas.
 - i. And that is probably because
 - (1) since it was the first place we encountered him as children
 - (2) It is the final place we look for him as secularized adults.
 - d. Even those people who never set foot in church at any other time of year, will be here next week,
 - i. Listening for him in the well-known stories and familiar carols,
 - ii. Looking for him in the flowers and the candles and of course in the manger.
 - iii. And let's be honest, so will we.
6. And in that we have something in common with those people in today's Gospel.
 - a. Oh they were not there to celebrate Christmas; of course not; the celebration of Christ's birth would not be celebrated until hundreds of years later.
 - b. No , what we have in common with them is that they too lived a world where things were changing; and not for the better.

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- i. Roman businessmen were buying up land and evicting people who had lived there for thousands of years.
 - ii. Roman armies were oppressing the people,
 - iii. Roman tax collectors were robbing them..
 - c. Life was becoming so unliveable that people were certain that it was only a matter of time before the Messiah would come,
 - i. To overthrow the injustice of the Romans
 - ii. and establish his kingdom of justice and peace forever.
 - d. Some, like the Zealots, advocated the violent overthrow of the Romans through acts of terrorism, hoping to force the coming of the Messiah that way.
 - e. Some like the Essenes advocated going off into the desert and living a separate life, and wait for the Messiah whenever he came.
- 7. But then there was John
 - a. he was out in the desert,
 - i. but he was no separatist.
 - b. And though his language was often violent, speaking about threshing floors and unquenchable fires as he does in today's reading,
 - i. he was no terrorist.
 - c. What was he?
 - i. That was what the people wanted to know.
 - ii. That is why there were there.
 - iii. They came to Jordan River, to sit and listen to him, because they were looking for the Messiah; or if you want to say the word *Messiah* in Greek, they were looking for the Christ.
 - iv. Just like us.
 - (1) And they thought that they had found him - in John.
 - d. Now John informs them that he is not the Christ;
 - i. he is there to prepare them for the Christ;
 - ii. in short he is there to tell where to look for him.
 - (1) And where does he tell them to look?
 - (a) Not in sweet sounding songs and childhood beliefs
 - (b) nor in candles or the words of scripture
 - (2) Not that John would have disagreed with such things;
 - (a) indeed had he known about such things he might have recommended them too;
 - (b) but not first.
 - (c) Because John was interested in finding the Christ in the present, not in the past and wanted his hearers to find him there too.
- 8. So John said,
 - a. if you have more than you need, share with those who do not.
 - b. IF you are a tax collector, stop collecting more than you need
 - i. IF you are a soldier don't extort, tell the truth and be content with what you have.
 - ii. Now he was talking to tax collectors and soldiers and the rich;
 - (1) but not just them
 - (2) he was talking to all of us too.
 - c. Telling us that if we are looking for Christ;
 - i. we will find that he is already here right here and right now
 - (1) WHENEVER people practice generosity,
 - (2) whenever they act justly,

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- (3) and whenever the practice mercy.
 - (a) Because those are the signs of his kingdom;
 - (b) those are the signs that Christ is here.
- 9. This “holiday season” or to be more accurate, this advent season,
 - a. we have heard nothing of the War on Christmas.
 - b. And yet the desire that drove it in the minds and hearts of so many is still here.
 - c. So many of us are hoping that maybe this year we will find Christ
 - i. where we found him as children, in his little manger, under the tree.
 - d. I must admit, every year I hope I do, and you know sometimes, for an evening, a morning for a moment I do, in all the memories of Christmases past.
 - e. But friends, today a man from the distant past speaks to us in present, and given the way he spoke to the people back then,
 - f. if he were here in the present he would be insistent.
 - i. Enjoy your memories, he would say, but don’t look for Christ in the past; look for him in the present.
 - (1) Look for him whenever you are generous, sharing some of what you have with those who don’t
 - (2) Look for him whenever you act justly, treating people fairly and equally.
 - (3) Look for him whenever you practice mercy.
 - ii. These things may not have much to do with Carols and candles,
 - iii. These things might not even be specifically Christian; after all even non Christians can be generous, fair and merciful.
 - iv. But of course that is just John’s point.
 - (1) Because if the one whose birth we will celebrate next week has any meaning to us here and now
 - (a) it is because he can be found here and now;
 - (i) at work and active;
 - (ii) any time anyone does his will;
 - (b) Which might be the reason why Jesus says in so many other parts of the Gospel that when the Kingdom of the Messiah finally does come; we will find some strange people in it;
 - (c) People like .
 - (i) tax collectors
 - (ii) Soldiers
 - (iii) Prostitutes
 - (iv) Sinners
 - (v) Me and you
 - (2) For when we do these things we do not HAVE to wait for Christmas to find Christ
 - (3) When we do these things every day is Christmas
 - (4) We are the manger
 - (5) And Christ is born in us
 - (6) for all the world to see.
 - (7) for it is at that moment his kingdom, and thus he is here.