

Advent 4C – God does extraordinary things through ordinary people

1. I usually don't follow-up a Sunday service from a midweek theme but this week's Wednesday night service introduced a subject that permeates Scripture
 - a. For those who haven't been able to make our midweek services our devotions followed CPH's "Symbols of Salvation" which looked at various appearances of the pre-incarnate (before He was human) Christ
 - i. The series focused on three Old Testament narratives that are foreshadowing's of Jesus' coming to share in our humanity: the burning bush, the cloud in the tabernacle, and the call of Gideon.
 - ii. In each of these God met and interacted with His people through the Angel of the Lord – God's presence among His people, this was the Son of God before He was born as a human
 - iii. Last week God raised up Gideon to defeat the Midianites who were oppressing His people, Israel
 - iv. And what we found out about Gideon is that God used someone who didn't think much of himself, listen to him when God commissions him, **"And the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?" And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."** (Jdg 6:14-15)
 - v. Not much of a hero to our ears, but through Gideon the Lord defeated the Midianite horde with a mere 300 soldiers who didn't even have to fight.
 - b. Aside from the appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ what we see in Gideon himself is that he is a picture of Christ, a mighty deliverer who appeared anything but mighty but whom God raised up to accomplish His purposes
 - i. And we see the same in Christ, He is the mighty and eternal Son of God, yet He was born in a stable and laid in a cattle trough for a crib.
 - ii. He lived as an uneducated carpenter's son and died a criminal's death on a cross but was guilty of no crime or sin
 - iii. Yet behind that apparently weak veneer was the very Son of God Himself, the creator and sustainer of heaven and earth
 - iv. Who voluntarily clothed Himself in weakness and humility to save His wayward creation.
2. This is the way that God works, through means that no one in their right mind would choose – the least likely, apparently foolish, and weakest to accomplish His goals
 - a. That is the insight to God's mind that Paul reveals for us in I Cor, **"But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world,**

even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast..." (1Co 1:27-29)

- i. Do you want to know how God operates, what's in His heart and mind...look no further than those verses.
 - ii. Think you've got God figured out if it doesn't sound like Paul's words you're not imagining the right God.
 - iii. Why doesn't the world KNOW God because that kind of "wisdom" is antithetical to everything sinful human beings hold dear or think is the way things should work.
 - iv. But not so with God and all of this is so that He confounds the ways of the world so that no one can attribute His work to any human wisdom or strength.
- b. We see that again in today's Gospel lesson – the great reversal: the mighty are brought low and the lowly are exalted
- i. Today we hear Mary say what has come to be called the Magnificat, which is Latin for "magnify" – which is how Mary begins, "**My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...**" (Lk 1:46-47)
 - ii. Mary is visiting with her pregnant cousin Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist) in the hill country of Judah.
 - iii. And she says in response to all God has done for her, "**He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.**" (Luk 1:51-53)
 - iv. Just as God raised up Gideon to save Israel from Midian now He has raised up a young girl of humble estate to be the mother of His Son.
 - v. And Mary's words reveal that at her young age (tradition has held that Mary was a teenager) she understood better than most other Biblical characters (Moses, Gideon, David, etc) how God works and that is GREAT news for us!
- c. Why might you ask is that great for us? Because if God uses broken, insignificant people to accomplish His tasks then He can use us too
- i. I don't mean to be insulting, but I think I'm on safe ground here when I say we're all pretty insignificant, at least in the eyes of the world.
 - ii. Anyone going to the UN next week to discuss global warming or the CDC to contribute to the ongoing delivery of care amid COVID or the Treasury Department to address inflation or any of the myriad big topics facing the global community...I thought not.

- iii. Don't feel bad, don't go away mad, welcome to the club – a club that includes Abraham, Moses, Gideon, David, Mary, and most importantly Jesus
- iv. God loves people who have been ground up in the machine of life, hurt by suffering and illness, marginalized by the those on the inside, the lowly
- 3. You see God loves the underdog, He's not pulling for the rich, the powerful, the well-heeled and well-connected – they're too busy with their status in this life
 - a. Listen to the words of the Lord that He spoke to Israel as they were about to enter the Promised Land, “[The Lord] executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.” (Deu 10:18)
 - i. Or again in James, “Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?” (Jas 2:5)
 - ii. As our Lord said when the scribes and Pharisees wondered why He ate with neerdowells He replied, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Mar 2:17)
 - iii. The Lord doesn't seek those who are self-sufficient because in their minds they don't need saving rather He works with the broken, the downtrodden, the poor in spirit – those who recognize their spiritual need
 - iv. If you think you're doin' alright on your own...you're a pretty good person...then you probably don't belong here God wants those who recognize their need for a savior – the broken, the lost
 - b. And He saves them not through the rich and powerful, not through the mighty and the glorious but through the meek and humble – through Christ
 - i. Through Jesus' suffering, shame, and death on the cross God has fully demonstrated that He works mightily through human weakness.
 - ii. Listen to Paul speaking about Jesus in Php, “**And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,**” (Php 2:8-9)
 - iii. My dear friends in Christ, God does extraordinary things through very ordinary people – rejoice and be glad with Mary and all the saints of God that you would be included in such august company where you too can say, “He has exalted those of humble estate through Christ!”