

“All flesh shall see the salvation of God” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
December 9, 2018, Second Sunday of Advent
Luke 3:1-6

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Let me read this same scripture text updated.

In the third year of the administration of President Donald Trump, when Jerry Brown was governor of the state of California, V. Manuel Perez was county supervisor for district four of Riverside County, Greg Pettis was incoming mayor of Cathedral City, during the time when J. Herbert Nelson was Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA and Timm High was Executive Presbyter for the Riverside Presbytery in California, the Word of the Lord came to ... you! And YOU went out into your neighborhood, appeared before your city council, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

You – proclaiming a baptism of repentance before the city council!

You’ve heard this scripture many times. It’s part of the scripture lessons read during the Advent season as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our savior, Jesus. However, it’s one thing to read this scripture realizing 2000 plus years have passed. That distance allows each of us to view this story of John the Baptist as history. It’s a nice story. It happened long ago. Like the Star Wars film beginning: ‘long ago and far away.’

It’s another thing to hear this scripture localized. How did the hearing of the scripture change when I read it to you with the names of individuals you recognize? Did it make you consider that the message of the scripture was not ‘long ago and far away’ – but current to our situation today? How did the reading affect you when you heard that each of us has the same responsibility as John the Baptist to prepare the way for Christ in our lives and in the world?

A scripture message current to our situation today? Yes, really. Our world today is not that much different from the world in which John the Baptist and Jesus lived. Let’s briefly compare the world in which Jesus began his ministry and our world today. The first century world was organized into political entities as is our world today. There was the national government. In Jesus’ day, the emperor and in our day, the president. The next level down, the state. In Jesus’ day, Pontius Pilate governor of Judea and in our day, Jerry Brown, governor of California. Just as we have today, in Jesus’ day there were local officials – town councils and city clerks.

What about the religious world? There were many religions in Jesus’ day. People worshipped many different gods. Gods with a small g. There were gods for every event in life – fertility, happiness, wealth, etc. There were regional gods that watched over a particular city or area. In contrast, the Jews worshipped one God. That’s God with a capital G. Today, there are still many people worshipping a variety of gods while Christ-followers and those practicing the Jewish religion still worship only one God.

One final comparison. The culture in Jesus’ day was dominated by those with economic power and political power who were rich and masterful and lived by different rules and standards than common people. Not much different than today.

If our world is not that much different from the world in which John the Baptist proclaimed his message of repentance, then the lesson of this scripture applies today with urgency – perhaps

the same urgency as it did in John the Baptist's day. However, there has been one major change in the world since the time of John the Baptist, one that I must mention.

John the Baptist was preparing the world to see the salvation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. We live in the world after Christ's resurrection. We no longer need to be prepared to see the salvation of God because Jesus Christ's life brought the salvation John the Baptist was looking towards. Jesus Christ was born, ministered, crucified and resurrected from the dead to show us God's salvation.

The salvation of our God has been revealed in Jesus Christ. That is the message that each of us needs to be sharing with the city council, with our friends and neighbors, with the rich and powerful, with the elected official and the homeless person, the immigrant. Jesus came into this world with his message of love and life. Christ's message is a message of hope; a message that God loves each person God created and cares about everyone's life. It is a message that offers new life, a new way to live in the world.

In Advent, we prepare for Christ's birth. With that birth and Christ's life, we know of God's love for all humanity. And we, like John the Baptist, have a message to proclaim. Are you sharing with others the message of God's life-giving love revealed to us in Christ's life?

A Gen-Xer hungry for God wrote this poem about what his generation and perhaps our culture is looking for today (Tim Celek and Dieter Zander, *Inside the Soul of a New Generation* [Grand Rapids,: Zondervan, 1996], 106-107).

Do you know,
do you understand
that you represent
Jesus to me?

Do you know,
do you understand
that when you
treat me with gentleness,
it raises the question in my mind
that maybe he is gentle, too?
Maybe he isn't someone
who laughs when I am hurt.

Do you know,
do you understand
that when you listen to my questions
and you don't laugh,
I think,
"What if Jesus is interested in me, too?"

Do you know,
do you understand
that when I hear you talk about arguments
and conflict and scars from your past
that I think, "Maybe I am just a regular person
instead of a bad, no-good, little girl who deserves abuse?"

If you care,
I think maybe he cares --
and then there's this flame of hope
that burns inside of me,
and for a while,
I am afraid to breathe
because it might go out.

Do you know,
do you understand
that your words are his words?
Your face,
his face
to someone like me?

Please be who you say you are.
Please, God, don't let this be another trick.
Please let this be real.
Please.

Do you know,
do you understand
that you represent
Jesus to me?

Jesus came so that **all flesh shall see the salvation of God**. Our world desperately needs to know God's story – the story we're all so familiar with of Jesus' birth in a stable, of his ministry of love and life and his death and resurrection. Jesus' life, his actions, revealed God's love to the world. This Christmas, and all year long, let each of us proclaim God's love to the world in which we move and breath.