

WELCOME 4th December 2022 – 2nd Sunday in Advent '22 A

Luke 3:1-6

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups** on Friday @ 1p.m. Which will resume THIS Friday!

As we move into this week... **Are** you ready for Christmas?

No matter how much you prepare...it always seems to arrive before you're really ready...especially if there's small children or travel involved. And then...no sooner is it here, than it is over...another year...another page torn off the calendar. More bills to pay more stuff to clean up, give away or throw away or return...

But what if we could **REALLY LIVE** like Christmas was more than a day...more than a season of silly...more than food & family & money spent faster than it's earned? What if we could **REALLY LIVE** like Christmas was a **PERSON** who is here now & every day? Whose presence & power are ours in every season...silly sad or sensational? Who never leaves & never lets go of our lives?

What if we lived hearing his voice speaking love & assurance, joy & peace, strength & hope into our hearts every...single...day? **Prepare** the way for the Lord's coming!

This year God wants to give so much more than a temporary fix to the deep longings in our hearts. God actually longs to have us whole & healed, at peace & content, living out joy & hope as his voice leads us through each day. We'll experience that together today...and we'll listen as we pray & light the 2nd candle on the Advent Wreath.

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father we long for your promise fulfilled...of a world put right: Where enemies are reconciled, & children play in safety: Where the poor & powerless find justice. We remember your promise of removing every obstacle to your work restoring our lives in your image; of being filled with your presence & delighting in your salvation...Come Lord Jesus! We turn to you, in readiness for all things to be made new!

Someone light the Advent Wreath

*O come, green shoot of Jesse, free
Your people from despair and apathy;
Forge justice for the poor and the meek,
Grant safety for the young ones and the weak.
Rejoice, rejoice! Take heart and do not fear,
God's chosen one, Immanuel, draws near.*

Let it be in us according to your eternal promise in Jesus... Amen.

Let's hear God's word...

2nd Sunday in Advent '22 A – EXPERIENCE CHRISTMAS: HEAR THE VOICE

My name's Paul. I was born in _____, QLD. My wife is Philippa & our children are Josh & Hannah. This is...(pick someone from the congregation you know & agrees to help) They were born in _____. They've been married to _____ for _____ years. They have _____ children & worked as a _____. This is...(pick someone else from the congregation you know won't mind...a few details.)

Why all these facts? Names? Places? Details? Because the finer points of this life matter to God. The details matter. The specifics are important. The personal moments matter to God. Late in his life Jesus would tell those around him, *"even the hairs on your head are numbered."* Whether it's a lot or a little they matter to God.

How do I know that to be true...& what does that have to do with anything? Look at today's Gospel/Good News from Luke. In the first 2 verses, Luke gives us **10** names, 6 geographic locations, 4 different "titles," & 1 calendar reference. The names... Tiberias, Pilate, Herod Antipas, Philip, Lysanias...these men aren't just thrown together in a "rogues gallery" of 1st century bad guys, although they certainly fit the bill. They were all violent, repressive, corrupt, rash, heavy-handed...Then there's Annas & his son-in-law Caiaphas, corrupt men with religious clout & power. These men were the religious & political big-shots of the day in their corner of the world.

And they were **REAL**. They are part of the fabric of history. You can hit the library or any internet search to find more than you care to know about each of them. Real people. Real events. Real occurrences. No Aesop fables of Grimm fairy tales. Not well-told mythology or a well-constructed novel: real people living in a real world going about the real business of running a real empire or a territory or a religion.

This is the same 'fair dinkum' world we experience, not make-believe stuff. There is nothing here in common with Hollywood. There is nothing here of philosophy or opinions or the marketplace of ideas. The pulse of the good news of Jesus beats through the real bloodstream of this world. You see lots of folks are more comfortable with ideas & opinions & philosophies. Not only on the internet where ideas & opinions are thicker than mosquitoes this month, but almost every local paper devotes space & ink to what people "think." They even "ask" for opinions. Some of them are doozies! It's easy to debate & rationalize & pontificate about ideas & opinions & philosophies...stand in the car park of the school or church...sit in any café in town & you get lots of opinions...

But it's **this real** world that matters to God...The real world where you & I live filled with birthday parties & pregnancy, street festivals & surgery, cancer & comedians, politicians & terrorists, Christmas decorations & travel plans, school busses &

garage bands... floods & who knows what-all? It's this real world that matters to God. Why? Because this is the world God fashioned according to his plans & his desires. This is the world God crafted to fulfil his delight. This is the world God populated with us shaped in his image to live in his presence & revel in his love & live out his purposes here...in ...this...world. This is the world God populated with us shaped in his image to live responsive to him & enjoying him every day. *And...* This is the world where we rebelled & the very same world God wants back...wants to restore into the fullness he always intended.

Into **this** world: **Prepare** the way for the Lord's coming! John the Baptizer, devoted to God, living in the desert discovers that right before his eyes was the time God was going to make that restoration happen. John receives a word from God that God has plans for the whole world, for *"all people,"* but even more God has plans for him. John is to be in on the action as God's salvation reaches the world. God will use John's fairly ordinary camel-hair-wearing honey-&-locust-eating everyday self to be the channel through which God prepares the world for His grace – mercy – love & forgiveness to flow to *all people* everywhere.

Out of all the voices in the Roman Empire...of the thousands of words spilled by Tiberias, Pilate, Herod Antipas, Philip, Lysanias & Annas & Caiaphas...of the crowds of people who milled & mulled their way through daily life in Judea; **John** hears one voice...one voice above the din of the world – clearer than all the competing voices & more enthralling than all the threatening voices & more captivating that all the alluring voices...**a** voice of love...promise...hope...assurance

John hears the voice that God loves this real world in all of its jumbled tumbled broken messy real-ness. John receives a word a voice from God that God is not some remote Being in an unreachable heaven – not a philosophical concept about which people may debate. John hears God's own voice promising that God chooses to be personally here with us & for us. He is coming. **Prepare** the way for the Lord's coming!"

John then lifts his voice to declare that God desires above all things to draw to Himself His human creation free from all that weighs us down & traps us & binds us & keeps us from living the full/abundant lives God desires for us. John uses his voice to proclaim that God desires above all things to draw to Himself His human creation free from everything that separates us from Him & each other. (That's what all that road construction imagery is about...getting rid of the obstacles, removing the barriers, so that nothing stands between us & God & God's desires for us.)

John's voice announces that God desires above all things to draw to Himself His human creation free for the life only He can give. John brings a voice of assurance that God is not ashamed of us or hiding from us but desperately seeking us with an anguished passionate love that can only be expressed by sharing our life – hopes – dreams – failures making abundant life possible for people like us who don't really deserve it. John speaks with clarity that no one is beyond the grasp of God's love & that God refuses to keep His hands off of us, & in fact won't rest until we are all taken in close to his heart.

John is entrusted with the good news that the world is about to meet in real life in real flesh the Son of God who will give up heaven to come to earth to live with & love humankind – to be tortured – to be crucified – to be buried – to be raised from death – to forgive my sin & yours – to pour out his love & his Spirit into my heart & yours – to make my/your life like his & share his power & abundance with me/you now & forever. I've used the word "real" alot. But I hope you don't hear that word now like it's used on our televisions where "reality TV" is built around contrived circumstances with artificial situations & manufactured relationships. I am well aware that most of us get through our lives just fine without the benefit of producer, director or makeup help.

You & I live the hard reality where you only get one "take." And that hard reality is this...God's plan from the beginning was to be in relationship with people so that people could also be in relationship with each other. But human beings have rejected that plan; & chosen instead to wander in the wilderness of broken dreams, empty hopes, unfulfilled promises & absolute enmity with each other. Our birthright our human inheritance in this life is that we are all born into a broken world where that brokenness - pain – loss – hurt & death are our constant companions. In almost every moment of this life you & I can experience the chaotic jumble of joy/sorrow, delight/anguish, hope/hurt...and into our existence Jesus is born. He shares from day one of his birth everything this world holds. Into our existence Jesus is born. He shares from day one of his birth the entire chaotic jumble that makes up your life & mine. All the rough places, deep treacherous valleys, crooked paths...he knows & shares alongside us. The antagonism of an unbelieving world, the treachery of those we thought were on our side & the humiliation of our own failures...Jesus embraces that life for us so we can have his life in the arms of the Father forever.

You see...our birthright/human inheritance in this life is also that we long for "more." We hunger for "more" than this life holds. We yearn for a life bigger & better than the brokenness we experience. We thirst for "more." And for that "more" Jesus is born. John declared that that One was coming whose very presence would change our

existence from the inside out. John proclaimed that the Coming One brought all the fullness of God & God's plans, purposes, desires & intentions for you & for me & for all people...all the promises of God would be fulfilled right before our eyes.

Can you hear that? God speaks to your heart & mine each day...God says He cares enough about this creation called earth & about each one of us to actually take our form...to enter our space & share our hopes & dreams & disasters to make abundant life possible. God says He will not give up on this world...full stop. Whatever it takes, God will make His plans for us come to pass. Whatever it takes for the relentless love of God to take hold in your life & mine God will do. Whatever it takes God will overcome the separation between us & Him. Whatever it takes God will draw us to himself in love & forgiveness.

Can you hear it? You & I are created, born, pointed toward, aimed at, designed for this universe-wide cosmic gathering in the arms of Jesus in the hands of God. And the best news of all is that it doesn't depend on our efforts to make it happen! It's already been bought & paid for signed sealed & delivered by Jesus himself – through his death & resurrection...we just need to live like we know what's coming!

God promises that whoever you are & whatever you're doing in life right now God sees YOU as someone of infinite value & eternal worth. God promises that defeat is not forever & death does not have the last word. God promises that he intends for us a "*future filled with hope,*" a destiny brimming with joy & peace & a today overflowing with purpose & meaning. Can you hear that promise...assurance?

What if we **REALLY LIVED** like Christmas was a **PERSON** who is here now...every day? Whose presence & power are ours in every season...silly sad or sensational? Who never leaves & never lets go of our lives? Who stands alongside you speaking to you in the little details & ordinary places & moments of your life? What if we lived hearing his voice speaking love & assurance, joy & peace, strength & hope into our hearts every...single...day? This year God wants to give so much more than a temporary fix to the deep longings in our hearts. God actually longs to have us whole & healed, at peace & content, living out joy & hope as his voice leads us through each day.

TAKE IT HOME -

What's one thing you will do between now & the New Year to listen for God speaking to you in your ordinary daily activities?

and...What do you think God will say & what will you do when he says it?

Share your thoughts with your neighbour...

Let's pray...