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The First Sunday in Advent Malachi 3:1-6, 4:4-6; Luke 5:1-25; Psalm 46

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Devotional
The First Sunday in Advent
November 27, 1988
Malachi 3:1-6, 4:4-6; Luke 5:1-25; Psalm 46

HE'S LOST!!!! Those words sum up all the anguish of a parent over a missing child, and we have uttered them thrice about our older son. The first time occurred at a crafts fair in Malvern when Stephen was barely able to walk. I had carried him most of the day in a backpack, and he wanted down! Something caught his attention and off he went, squirming through the crowds into oblivion. The second time, low racks of clothing in a Little Rock department store seemed made for him to disappear as if into a jungle. From sheer exuberance he dashed off on a safari of discovery.

On both occasions we sought him without more panic and we went our way a bit shaken but without lasting distress. The last time was different.

The last vanishing act came after Andrew's birth but before he could walk, when Stephen was about five. We had a son in tow and the other in a stroller. An escalator precipitated the crisis. The stroller balked at the bottom. While we struggled to get it off, Stephen scooted around the corner and was gone!

Authorities tell you to stay put and let a lost child come back. Following such instructions in a panicked state is almost impossible. Fortunately there were two of us. Ronnie remained with Andrew in the stroller and I began a series of arcs, trying to cover all directions. A few minutes into what felt like an eternity to all of us, a panic-stricken youngster emerged from the clothes seeking his parents!

The authorities had been right, but this occasion differed from its predecessors. This time the volition had been with our son as we stood and waited. Authoritative advice worked because Stephen realized that he was lost and sought us.

Malachi captures the crucial difference in our experiences in the first verse of the listed readings. God says “Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, WHOM YOU SEEK, will suddenly come to His temple....” (NAS, emphasis mine)

God’s messenger reveals our lostness, and spurs us to seek our Heavenly Father, the Parent who stands unmoved in the place where we saw Him last. Unlike an earthly parent, this one is omnipresent, eagerly awaiting our seeking to reveal Himself before our very eyes. He awaits our willingness to feel His embrace and hear His voice say the loving words, “Here I am, my child. Don’t be afraid.”

Prayer: Lord, Help us seek your face with greater diligence and see it with greater clarity through Your messenger this Advent season.

Ray Granade

Devotional

The Second Monday in Advent

December 5, 1988

Isaiah 8:5-8, 11-20, 9:8-17; Mark 2:23-3:6; Psalm 33

At first glance, these readings seem appropriate for a season other than Advent. Mark tells of Jesus' confrontation with Jewish leaders over Sabbath-keeping. The Psalm praises the Creator and Preserver. Isaiah reports God's warning to Israel that the Assyrians will conquer and obliterate them like a flood because of their faithlessness. What light can they shed upon the Infant in the manger?

The psalmist's praise rests on God's nature (upright, faithful, and loving), on His speaking creation into existence and guiding its operation, and His intimate knowledge of all parts of His creation (He sees and knows all and "understands all their works"). Mark recounts Jesus' words to the Pharisees about God as Creator and fount of goodness. Isaiah joins the psalmist and Mark in proclaiming God holy, a refuge for those who fear Him.

Isaiah and the psalmist point to God as Living Word, Creator, and sanctuary. Yet the sanctuary is not passive. The psalmist envisions God's eye upon "those who fear Him," delivering them as a help and shield. Jesus replies to the Pharisees that God has provided for His creation before the need for help arises.

All three notice man's pride and its result. The psalmist notes that all earthly refuges are vain: an army can't save a king, strength a warrior, or a horse its master. Isaiah accuses the Israelites of pride and arrogance—they boast that they will replace brick with

smooth stones and sycamores with cedars, and will be more prosperous than previous generations. Mark records the Pharisees' response to human need—an appeal to the law, which they proudly kept and used as a weapon against others.

Finally, each passage repudiates the Israelites' long history of finding their justification in rules. The psalmist calls for an outpouring of God's lovingkindness, not rule-keeping ability. Isaiah acknowledges that Israel's leaders (both honorable elders and false prophets) teach them to fear the wrong things. Jesus responds to the Pharisees with anger and grief at their hardness of heart when they accuse the disciples of violating the Sabbath rules because of their hunger and Jesus himself for doing good rather than harm, for healing rather than killing.

These Scriptures call us to sanctuary in the Living Word lying in the manger; to the Babe's humility instead of the pride which separates us from God; and to freedom from justification through rules which "rules out" the need for the Child who calls in love for each of us to join Him.

Prayer: Lord, in humility and contrition we confess our failures to hear the Living Word as He calls us from the manger. Help us regain the perspective offered by the season and its promise of renewal..

Ray Granada