

“New Creation Sermon”

Sara J Larson

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Lay Minister

Luke 1:5-25

December 1 & 2, 2018

First Lutheran Church

Marshall, MN

We have now entered into the season of Advent. You may be wondering what Advent actually means. It is the first season in the church year. The liturgical color is purple or blue. These colors symbolize God’s power. It is to be a time of fasting and repentance; accepting that God is sovereign over all. He rules and reigns over everything and has the ability to control and arrange anything as he chooses. Advent extends through the four Sundays leading up to the birth of Christ and Christmas. Advent means arrival, to come into place, view or being. We light candles on a wreath which represents eternal life. The four candles symbolize hope, love, peace and joy. (Children’s Sermon- 8:30am)

Advent is a time for more than shopping and getting the best Christmas photo in the mail. It should be a time of reflection of your existence and purpose. The prophet Jeremiah tells a great non-fictional tale about of the coming of the Lord’s new covenant with his people. This new covenant is not even close to the same as the original contract that the Lord made with the people who he brought out of Egypt. The Lord was certainly committed to his people then and even indicates that he was a “husband” to them. Meaning the Lord was in a committed relationship with his people. He loved them and cared for them and even brought home the manna for them. But the people of Israel did not reciprocate the commitment. They took what they needed and complained the whole time. They were a nagging and adulterous wife, quick to worship other Gods. But instead of divorcing us, God makes a new vow to us and this time he expected nothing in return.

In the second lesson today, Zachariah is told the prayer he and his wife had prayed many many times, years and years before will finally be granted. Zechariah is standing at the alter in the Temple offering incenses and raising up the prayers of the people. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity. His name was drawn out of 20,000 priests to be able do this. He was focused on his task and thrilled to be doing it when all of the sudden in comes this Angel of the Lord and tells him, “Old man, you are gonna have a son and he isn’t gonna be just any kid- He is going to be filled with the Holy Spirit and he will turn many towards God and prepare everyone for the coming of Jesus”.

Zachariah doubts the Angel. We talked about doubt with the senior high kids this week. We talked about how doubt is often necessary and leads us to seek the truth and deepen our faith. There is “*good doubt*” and “*bad doubt*”. *Good doubt* makes you question your thoughts and beliefs and dig in to figure out how something can be true. *Bad doubt* is when you don’t want to even know or believe and close the whole thing off as not even possible. When the Angel of the Lord comes to Mary and tells her she will have a baby. She asks a *good doubt* question “How can this be? As I have never been with a man?” She doesn’t say “I don’t believe you”, like Zachariah did. As a result Zachariah is made mute until he writes his son’s name on a piece of papers on his circumcision day, which read “His name will be John”; just as the Angel of the Lord had told him.

The Lord knows we are imperfect and incapable of loving him and honoring him without fail. He knows that at times we have good doubt and bad doubt. He bases his new covenant and pact with us on the premise that his commitment does not correlate to any works we do, but only the adoration he has for us. Like a father, loves their child even when they do wrong, Our Savior will love us and want the best for us. Jeremiah says the Lord will write it on our hearts. Our hearts tend to be the place we search when we need direction. Our hearts hold our wants, desires and feelings of obligation. If God’s law is written on our hearts, it is like our conscious telling us what to believe.

Have you ever had something on your heart? You try to do your regular routine and this image or tugging feeling keeps pulling your thoughts away from the task at hand. It seems to be telling you, that you need to be doing something else. Zachariah and Elizabeth were “righteous people”. They believed in God and served the Lord. But everyone doubted if they were just all show and no action, because they had never been blessed with a child. In those days and sometimes even today, people assumed it is a punishment from God to be barren.

God is writing the promise of eternal life on our hearts. He hears our prayers and knows our suffering. He wants us to communicate with him. Come to him with our concerns, not beat around the bush, but come right out and lay our burdens at his feet. He wants us to know we are his and he will never abandon us. He wants you to seek and feel, hope, love, peace and joy, even in your doubt just like the Advent candles. Let God define who you are, not the world. We are defined by who we are in God’s eyes, not by the circumstances we live in. God has other things in store for us besides what the world expects us to do. Everyone has a purpose and for everyone he has a plan. We just need to be willing to live into it and let it come to us in God’s time.

I have a wonderful elderly friend, whose son has been alcoholic most of his life. She has prayed for him endlessly and tirelessly for fifty years. She always thought he would die before her because of his addiction or poor self-care. This past summer he put himself into treatment. He

didn't quit for his kids, he didn't quit for his marriage, he didn't quit for his health and he certainly didn't quit for his mother. He just decided it was time to figure out why his life was such a mess. He went from *bad doubt* to *good doubt*. Instead of saying "It is not the drinking that is the problem" he said "I am going to see if the drinking is the problem." Him seeking the truth led to his recovery and was an answer to years and years of prayer, by a Godly woman.

Suffering is a necessary learning and loving process. Howard Thurman states that "out of our struggle we may be given insight into the suffering itself." "We may be given quiet assurance; we can relax our intent into God's purpose or turn it over to him for quiet obedience". But if this is not done, we will never be able to experience the four great symbolic candles that are lit each year during Advent, hope, love, peace and joy!

Jesus is coming, not just Christmas. His love and compassion will be revealed, if you let it be. The new covenant detailed in Jeremiah states God will forgive our iniquities and erase our sins from his memory. If the Creator of all life, the All-knowing, all seeing God of Mercy can forgive us, we best find a way to forgive ourselves, so we can make our way through the suffering and let his love fill up the cracks and make us whole. Any decision or prayer or response made out of a lack of hope, "*bad doubt*", is a bad decision. Any decision, prayer or response made out of faith or "*good doubt*" will likely help us find hope and rest in his peace and experience joy and love again. Our sacrifice is worthless to the world and the standards of the times, but to God it is **everything**.

In writing this sermon, I feel compelled to share my story of redemption.

I submitted this writing as part of my candidacy essay. I had my entrance interview as a pastoral candidate Friday and I was accepted as a candidate. I am now on to the next phase in the process. Thank you for your prayers and support.

"New Creation"

I was a flawless fiesta style yellow ceramic vase. Strong and slender, fluted and weighted. The glaze on my finish was shiny and intense. Yet, I was full of that gunky, stinky water that grows without anyone seeing or smelling it. I was desperately trying to keep everything I held alive and I could not see any reprieve.

Over the years, I had been knocked over and even chipped, but I hide the pressure cracks and used ribbon to detract from my imperfections. I was resilient and stunning from a distance and that is where I stayed until my contents were dumped out and my body was hurled at a cement wall. The destruction was massive. My little parts could not get up and squeeze back together this time. I lay there a long time recognizing what had happened. I bravely asked for help and started letting people see the true inners of my existence.

My fragments were jagged and sharp. I fought through the loss of what I once was and worked on finding out who I now am. By the grace of God, I was able to slowly and tenderly start mending myself together. The love of my family and true friends, admission of my faults and willingness to feel the pain allowed someone other than myself to recreate me.

The puzzle was formidable, but I was not going to rush. I took one piece at a time and examined it and nurtured it and breathed new life into it. God found a place for each piece and I trusted it would hold.

Today I am a new creation; whole, approachable and beautiful because of my imperfections. I no longer hold everything. I let the joy I feel inside seep out along with my vulnerability and honesty. My contents change regularly and I no longer let the mold set in. I can stand alone, uncovered and I know that I am a creation of God, perfect in his eyes.

SJL

God has written this message of love and redemption on my heart. The same truth he writes on yours. Love is a swinging door. We never know how things will work out, but we **are known** by the God who created us and loves us and lives in us. Let *him* define you and work through you.

Amen!