

Advent A-3, 2007  
December 16, 2007  
Matthew 11: 2-11  
Title: Christmas Present

THE WILDERNESS AND THE DRY GROUND SHALL BE GLAD; THE  
EYES OF THE BLIND SHALL BE OPENED

THE LAME WALK

THE LEPERS ARE CLEANSED

THE DEAF HEAR

THE DEAD ARE RAISED AND THE POOR HAVE GOOD  
NEWS BROUGHT TO THEM

God does what the world thinks impossible.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, the  
giver of new life.

Christmas presents. Got all your Christmas shopping done? The giving of  
gifts at Christmas can be so highly emotionally charged. Advertisers know  
that about the Christmas season. I didn't know there were so many jewelry  
stores

In Wake County until watching TV during December.

“Give her the gift she deserves,” they tell us.

How wonderful it is when you have planned and given just the right gift.  
And how not so wonderful it is when your plans come across as a lead  
balloon. And instead of expressing love, the gift somehow diminishes it.

We have a history with Christmas gift giving.

We have a history with the gift of Christmas, Jesus.

What kind of Christmas present is he?

I sometimes listen to radio preachers. I heard one whose  
Consistent mantra was IF YOU BELIEVE ON JESUS, NOTHING  
CAN GET YOU DOWN.

He went on ‘Say you got a cold, say you got a fever, believe on  
Jesus, and it will disappear!’ And then he gave a testimony about  
‘How the Lord had taken his hay fever away.’

I don't doubt his sincerity. But here Jesus-- wrapped in instantaneous, presto package. A kind of Spiritual Santa Claus doling out remedies just for the asking. Just believe.

It's been suggested that the fast food drive-through window symbolic of the way we approach God. As though we might drive up to the order board and a voice comes over the speaker

WELCOME TO YAHWEH'S, MAY I HELP YOU?

The order is taken and seconds later at the drive through out pops

An order of French Fried Prayer Answers,  
A Heavenly Hamburger complete with two all blessed patties,  
Abundant life pickles and tomatoes,  
Topped with spicy Eden grown lettuce, praise the Lord cheese,  
Yahweh's sanctimonious sauce, all of this wrapped in presence of the power buns...and to wash it all down, yes, a 16 ounce glass of Jordan River juice.

Before we rant and rave over such Santa Clausing of Jesus, be mindful of God's audacity! If we set aside our hope in God, if we whittle down our Expectations, if we assume in the Christmas present named Jesus all we are left to do is put him back in the attic until next Christmas, we Of all people are needing a jolt.

Isaiah and the radio preacher are related. While Isaiah doesn't talk of the heavenly quick fix, neither does he whittle down the gifts God brings—the wilderness and the

Dry land shall be glad; the eyes of the blind shall be opened.

Things are settled! Dryness, blindness

Ain't all there is.

John the Baptist isn't sure who Jesus is. He may have expected when Jesus burst out of Bethlehem there would be a revolution, the Romans would be overthrown....Now in prison John must have reduced expectations

His question "Are you the one who is to come or shall we wait for another?"

is code for 'what a disappointment.'

What do we do with these wild, fresh, large, abundant, blessed,  
Rich, overturning statements of Jesus?

Blind—see  
Lame—walk  
Lepers—cleansed  
Deaf—hear  
Dead—raised  
Poor—good news

Do we tame them, reduce them, domesticate them. Jesus so, sweet. Package him in something manageable like a church, a church that hasn't come to expect much from him.

In Walker Percy's novel *Love In the Ruins*, Dr. Thomas More is a Man deeply embittered by life. His daughter Samantha is dying of Neuro-blastoma and More refuses to ask for healing.

As though he were speaking for all who have  
Reduced their hopes, More says,

“Suppose you ask for a miracle and God says yes? How do you live the rest of your life?”

God says YES! Last Saturday night Sally and I were coming  
Back from a dinner and passed by our nephew's home. He's  
Married and goes to another church now. For which I'm glad

But as we passed by their home I had to say to Sally how much it hurt that they never came to Good Shepherd. I didn't expect them to come but just Occasionally. I told her I wasn't to proud of this feeling, but I had to acknowledge it.

Last Sunday, our nephew and his wife worshipped at Good Shepherd!

It's stayed with me. Lingered. Kind of a reminder, a small one all be It, of the audacity of God.

Suppose you ask for a miracle and God says yes? How do you  
Live the rest of your life?

When we were going through a crisis here at church, one that had me very rattled for which I couldn't envision any outcome that was life-giving  
A trusted colleague cut through to the gift of Jesus, when she said to me unequivocally 'God will see us through!'

Advent points us to the God sized gift of Jesus. We who have been baptized into Jesus are to continue, again and again, to unwrap the gift. How we view the future says volumes about our faith in him.

He continues to hold before us the audacity of his presence, even doing what the world believes impossible. Church of Jesus what will you do

When you are invited to be part of a Christ care group?  
Perhaps you have tried in the past to burst out of suburban  
Isolation and failed, perhaps you experienced  
Life here as a dry wilderness, for you a desert.

Which has more power over you? Such a history or the promise of Jesus to help the lame to walk? What newness is he seeking to birth in you? In us?

Is all we see a drought? Falls Lake now a small stream? God seems to always come along just when we are at our worst and tell us

I'LL SEE YOU THROUGH.

Before us is the gift of Jesus, who isn't settled about the death giving, diminishing powers. He wants to give people back their lives.

Jesus is a healing alternative to a diminished life.