

“Hope for the Unexpected and Unimaginable” | Rev. Tim Frickenschmidt | December 5, 2021

Old Testament Reading: [Malachi 3:1-4](#)

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. 2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.”

Epistle Reading: [Philippians 1:3-11](#)

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Gospel Reading: [Luke 3:1-6](#)

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 4 As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, 6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

Introduction

This world is a wilderness in which the powerful oppress the weak and suffering can break suddenly into our lives. But God is at work in the wilderness changing us through his unexpected love.

Background

1. The Names
 - a. History is filled with the names of powerful oppressors, but most of those names are forgotten.
 - b. The world of John the Baptist was divided and chaotic, much like our world.
 - c. God commits to enter into our chaotic world and be with us.
2. The Place
 - a. The wilderness is not a consoling retreat; it is a desert.
 - b. In the wilderness, we are hungry, thirsty, exposed, and alone.
 - c. The Christian life is a stern choice to enter into life’s troubles and apply God’s love.
 - d. The wilderness is a terrible place, but it is where change happens.
3. The Message
 - a. The one who began a good work in us will bring it to completion ([Philippians 1:6](#)).
 - b. The names that hang over us are God’s tools to change us.
 - c. The more we try to make a heaven of this world, the less we can enjoy it. The less we try to make a heaven of this world, the more we can enjoy it.

Discuss

1. What names hang over your life? A politician? An ex-spouse? A boss? A child?
2. Do you feel hungry, thirsty, exposed, or alone?
3. How do we sometimes try to make a heaven of this world?
4. What is one way you could make a stern choice to enter into the pain of this life and apply God’s love?

Conclusion/Application

The promise of advent is that, when we lose everything in the wilderness of this life, God comes to us, gives us his love, and changes us.

Prayer

Father, you are committed to breaking into the barrenness and pain of this world and giving your love. Please forgive us for vainly trying to make a heaven of this world. Give us the grace to make the stern choice to love others sacrificially as you have loved us. Thank you for sending your Son to endure the ultimate wilderness of the cross for us. Amen.

