

"A Void Becomes Visible" | Rev Tim Frickenschmidt | December 13, 2020

Old Testament Reading [Isa 61:1-4, 10-11](#)

⁶¹ ¹ The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are
bound;
² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³ to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of
ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, that He may be
glorified.
⁴ They shall build up the ancient ruins;
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.
¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;
my soul shall exult in my God,
for He has clothed me with the garments of
salvation;
He has covered me with the robe of
righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a
beautiful headdress,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its sprouts,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to
sprout up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and
praise
to sprout up before all the nations.

Epistle Reading [1 Thess 5:16-24](#)

⁵ ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give
thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of
God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the
Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies, ²¹ but test
everything; hold fast what is good. ²² Abstain from
every form of evil.
²³ Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you
completely, and may your whole spirit and soul
and body be kept blameless at the coming of our
Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is
faithful; He will surely do it.

Gospel Reading [John 1:6-8, 19-28, 3:25-30](#)

¹ ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name
was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness
about the Light, that all might believe through
him. ⁸ He was not the Light, but came to bear
witness about the Light. ...
¹⁹ And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews
sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask
him, "Who are you?" ²⁰ He confessed, and did not
deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." ²¹ And
they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He
said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he
answered, "No." ²² So they said to him, "Who are
you? We need to give an answer to those who
sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³ He
said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the
wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as
the prophet Isaiah said."

²⁴ (Now they had been sent from the
Pharisees.) ²⁵ They asked him, "Then why are you
baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah,

Introduction

Advent's primary purpose is to prepare us for the 2nd Coming of Christ. The emphasis of Advent is on waiting and hope that Jesus is coming, bringing a new future out of the old dark past, in which Paul calls us to rejoice always (1 Thess 5:16). So how can we know true joy without ceasing? Two points: (1) The Jews' Question and (2) John's Statements.

Background

1. The Jews' Question.

- The main question asked by the Jews' of John is: "Who are you?" (John 1:19&22). Everything in our Gospel Reading hinges on the question of John's identity. John is an outsider, literally and figuratively, so why are people flocking to him. Figuratively, because he is not one of the religious elite; and, he's telling everyone they need to repent and undergo serious spiritual change (to about face and forward march in a different direction: to a new, bright future); and, to mark that change they must undergo baptism which he was administering in the desert. So, the religious leaders, and even King Herod, don't like what John is doing, almost exclaiming "Who do you think you are, telling us to come to you to be baptized?" Baptism carries with it the requirement for repentance. We might try to kill the message of repentance, to cut it off like Herod, but it will keep whispering and it will whisper even now during Advent.
- We, also, have to deal with the question: Who are you? What constitutes our identity. Our answers, typically, fall within three main categories: (1) work (I am what I do), (2) love (I am what I'm in love with), and (3) politics (I am how I vote). If these are our answers, there is a problem: we won't be able to rejoice always, as Paul instructs us (1 Thess 5:16); we might have fleeting moments of rejoicing but not always and not in all circumstances. Work, love and politics can be good things if they are kept distinct from God. The problem for Christians is that none of these things have been promised to us. What He has promised us re:work is that the meek will inherit the earth; when Jesus returns, He will share all things with us, the entirely new made heaven and earth; He has promised re:love to be like a husband to us; He has promised us re:politics that He will bring His Kingdom to earth. We should be involved in work, love and politics but we can't let them become our identities. These things can be taken from us and, if they were, where would our joy be?

2. John's Statements.

- John organizes his gospel is through seven "I am" statements. The "I am" statements have a long biblical history, going back to the story of Moses meeting God at the burning bush when he said "Who are you?"; God said: "I AM WHO I AM." (Ex 3:14) Jesus takes that name on His lips in John's gospel (e.g., John 11:25 "I am the resurrection and the life") basically saying I am the God of the Old Testament, in the flesh, in your midst. But before John puts those words on Jesus' lips he puts them on John the Baptist but with a twist: three times John says: I am not" ... not the Christ (Messiah); not Elijah; not the Prophet.
- Consider that John's negatively emphasized answer is deeply Christian and it is absolutely necessary for us to know joy. So, how does John know joy?
[Excerpted from [The Epistle to the Romans](#), [Karl Barth](#): "A [Christian] may be of value to another man ... because of what he is not. ... The importance of a Christian is negative rather than positive. In him a void becomes visible. And for this reason he is something to others: he is able to share grace with them ... The Spirit gives grace through him."] John shows us what it is to be a Christian; because he is trying to help the Levites and priests to direct them to Jesus; he knows that his greatest worth is not what he is, it is what he isn't. He isn't God in the flesh, he's just a man like the others who need God to enter into the void of his soul and life that only God is big enough to fill. We try to fill this massive void all sorts of other stuff because we want our importance to be positive. We want to say I am this/that or I have done this/th; look at my house/family; value me because of what I am. But, that's not our faith; it's the insecure clamoring of people rule by sin, self-absorption and pride. The Gospel is not I am so love and accept me, it is the Gospel of I AM the God of heaven and earth who has come to you to untie your sandals.
- John makes two positive statements about himself: (John 1:23) I am a voice and (John 1:26) I baptize; I say and do some things but what I say and do point to someone else; if what I say and do are not connected to Him, it means nothing.

Discuss

- Explain/describe John's character traits (e.g., confidence, assertiveness, humility).
- Explain/discuss why/how repentance must precede serious spiritual change (1a).
- How is John's negatively emphasized answer deeply Christian (2b)?

<p>nor the Prophet?" ²⁶ John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands One you do not know, ²⁷ even He who comes after me, the strap of Whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." ²⁸ These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. ... 3 ²⁹ Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, He is baptizing, and all are going to Him." ²⁷ John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him.' ²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease."</p>	<p>4. How is the void made visible (2b)? Does this relate to finding true joy? 5. Discuss the danger of Christians missing the "I AM" in their midst (Conc/App).</p> <p>Conclusion/Application</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The real danger for us is that words, water, bread and wine mean nothing. We have to see, know and embrace Jesus who is in the words, water, bread and wine in order for them to be to us what we need for them to be. In John 1:26 John says "among you stands One you do not know" and that's the danger. Countless people who call themselves Christians who've been baptized, who come to church, listen to sermons, take communion, might be no different than the Levites and priests because they are concerned about is who they are (who I am) and they miss the I AM who is in their midst. They can't feel the weight of them not being worthy to untie His sandals but He has untied theirs. On the last night before Christ was crucified and died for the sins of the world, He did the unthinkable: He did what only slaves were allowed to do: untie peoples sandals and wash their feet; and He did that for His disciples. And, Peter objected because it was so lowly. But Jesus says He is going to go even lower, that He is going to the cross to die for his sins, as your God and Savior in the flesh before you. Because Jesus loved Peter that much ... and He loves us that much, too. That good news can give us joy in whatever circumstances we face. •God isn't ashamed of all the positive things we aren't or all the negative things we are. He has come into our midst, our running and our wandering, in order to catch us and to bring us home, at great and infinite cost to Himself. That is God's grace to us in Christ. Only God in Christ can fill that void in our lives and souls and give us joy in all circumstances. Joy is not circumstantial happiness; it is the overwhelming spiritual delight of God. He shares Himself and His joy with anyone who comes to Him, believes in Him and follows after Him. So, stop trying to fill the void with anything else and receive the joy, the very life and love God offers to us. •Those who repent and embrace what they are not can know Jesus in their midst and if they know Jesus in their midst, they can hear His voice and His voice can give you joy. It will not only give you joy it will also make you a voice. So in this season of Advent, be a voice for Jesus; speak about Him: how we have a bright and new promised future before us; we are uniquely able to share grace with others because of all we are not.
By Pete Myers	