



“Circle of Light: Comfort”

Second Sunday of Advent
Saturday and Sunday, December 9–10, 2017

All Services

The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13;
2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Christian writer C. S. Lewis writes “*As human beings we seek an enlargement of our being. We want to be more than ourselves. . . we want to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as with our own. . . We demand windows.*” Of course, the windows that he was speaking about were the great books and movies and stories that give us those windows. They convey to us deep meaning and many of them can touch us to our very core.

Now for a good movie or story it is important to have interesting characters. These characters can be both good or bad, they can be morally flawed or heroes. But we have to be into them, they have to be engaging to us. And so, you can have a character like Don Vito Corleone from the *Godfather*, or even a James Bond, or my wife's favorite, *The Devil Wears Prada*, Miranda Priestly. It can be different kinds of characters, but they have to be at least interested in them. And of course, it takes an understandable theme in the story; it has to hold together, it has to make sense to us. Good dialogue of course is important, but even more important than that is subtext, those subtle messages that convey to the audience without explicitly coming out and stating them. In other words, you want to let the audience figure out what's happening without telling them.

So, for example one of the greatest movies ever made *Citizen Kane* there's a connection made only in the beginning and the end of the movie of the main character with a snow sled named “*Rosebud.*” And that becomes a metaphor for his own striving for success, and power, and greed vs. what he really wanted in life simplicity, innocence, and family connection.

Or perhaps the movie *The Sixth Sense* where the young boy speaks to his therapist “*I see dead people.*” and what we realize later is “*and you're one of them.*”

Even blockbusters like *Star Wars* are filled with clues laying out the story bit by bit showing glimpses of what we might expect in the future.

Today in worship we have three very good intersecting stories at work.

The first story is Isaiah's.

In 587 B.C. the Babylonian Empire conquered Jerusalem. They completely destroyed the temple and took large numbers of its most influential and skilled citizens into exile. A book of scripture, the Book of Lamentations describes the outpouring of emotion that followed that terrible disaster for the Israelites. Now the prophet Isaiah offers counterpoints to that fear and distress. Isaiah is writing at the same time as the Book of Lamentations and yet what he offers is comfort. God will be with his suffering people, the barriers that they are not experiencing will be removed, the way, the terrible way will be made easy, and God will be present with the suffering people, the destruction and death that they are experiencing will not last. God will restore his people.

Isaiah writes *"The Lord God comes with might, his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd gather his lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep."*

The second story is Mark's story.

He hits us right away. No pulling punches. No hidden agenda. Mark's story is the "good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

He begins his story, not with angels announcing births, or shepherds in their fields, or pregnant young women bearing God in the flesh.

No, Mark begins his story with an interesting character. Actually, that's kind of an understatement.

John the Baptist's church, or synagogue, is in the backwater region of the Jordan River. He is a wild man in the wilderness, an old-fashioned hell fire and brimstone preacher. He was the original preacher who preached comforted to the afflicted and afflicted the comfortable.

When you and I are filthy with sin, when corruption and wickedness is a part of our human existence only a bath of water and prayer and Holy Spirit will get you and me clean again. And you would think that words like that would turn people away, especially with those crazy outfits and outrageous mealtime delights. . . camel hair frock coat, leather sash, locusts and wild honey, Yum!

Instead the people flocked to hear his message. Crowds came to repent of their past lies and instead turn to God who would make them new again.

John told them what life was really like, not the illusion that they had created for themselves, how they had it all together, emotionally and spiritually. Not the fantasy that they were the centers of their own universe and somehow life revolved around them. How they were perfect in their own eyes. John instead proclaimed the baptism of repentance, of turning the forgiveness of their sins.

The third story, the third story is the best story of all. It has the most interesting character, the most intriguing storyline. This story will leave you on the edge of your seats. The twists and turns of the story are familiar, because this story is yours.

It began when you were created in God's holy image. He made you a part of his family in baptism and promised you eternal life forever. Do you know, do you really know how incredibly much God loves you!

As you grew and spread your wings it was inevitable that mistakes would be made, that sins would be committed, that relationships with God or with others might be strained and even broken. But that never stopped God's pursuit of you.

Have you ever felt lost? Have you ever been afraid? Have you ever felt alone, or suffering, or sick or marginalized, or mourning the loss of a loved one?

God's story intersects with your story. The comfort that's preached by Isaiah is for you and for me. The call to repentance that was made by John the Baptist, your desire for life and hope and love and community intersects with God's holy story.

So, what will come next? How will your story continue?

Christian Pastor Brian McLaren in his book entitled *"Finding our Way Again: A Return to Ancient Practices"* suggests;

Advent is a season in which "We should mark our days not only with the cycles of the moon and the seasons, but also with occasions to tell our children the stories of our faith community's past so that this past will have a future, and so that our ancient way and its practices will be rediscovered and renewed every year."

When we gather as a community of faith and we put up and light the Advent wreath, the wreath that is in a circle, an eternal circle and lit up week after week showing the glowing light of Christ into our world, it tells us something about God and also about our life, our story. You and I continue to write that story. Our individual story and our stories together and maybe just maybe in the fullness of time our children and grandchildren will share that story themselves.

It will tell of the good that we did.

The light, the love that we shared.

The forgiveness that we offered one another.

And the hope that we gave to our neighbors.

So that all may know our Savior who comforts, saves and forgives. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Copyright © 2017, Jack M. Horner. All rights reserved.



www.trinitycamphill.org