

Lectionary C December 6, 2015, Advent 2
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, IN
Pastor Roberta Meyer

Malachi 3:1-4
Luke 1:68-79
Philippians 1:3-11
Luke 3:1-6

Too Busy Not to Pray

One morning last week, I was barely awake when my phone rang. I knew by the ring tone that it was my daughter, Emily. The one that is pregnant with her first baby and lives in Muncie. When I answered the phone, I heard sobs, “Emily, what’s wrong?” I could not make out what she was saying. “Emily, are you all right?” “Y-y-yes.” “Is everything all right with the baby?” “Y-y-yes.”

“Why are you upset?”

“I’m scared.”

“Why?”

Well, it seems they made a big decision the night before. They had been looking for quite a while and that night they found a vehicle they decided to buy. I guess it went too fast for her. They saw it. Stopped and test drove it and ended up driving home with it that night.

“I’m afraid we made the wrong decision—well, not really. I know we needed a different car before the baby comes. And this one is exactly what we wanted for the right price. I’m just afraid we can’t do it.”

“Why?”

“We’ve never done anything like this before. I—(here it comes), I feel like I am not doing anything to help my husband. All I am doing is sitting here, being pregnant”

It wasn’t about the car at all. It was about those pregnant hormones and all the stuff that is happening in her body. It is about feeling out of control of herself. Things are happening that she never expected. She feels like a giant excavator has rearranged her whole body. Things have been moved around, but instead of mountains being made low, where she had a valley is now a huge moving, thumping mountain that gets bigger every day.

Emily is in a time of preparation. It is an advent season of growing and preparing inside her body. And the things that she is used to “doing” are not possible, or even productive right now. All the “doing” is happening inside her. Her role in this is to understand this and take care of herself. She is an incubator for new life right now. And incubators do one thing. They be. They sit and be the warm protective place for that new life to grow.

She is getting a firsthand experience of what it means to be a human being. And during this Advent time of the year, she is an example to me of what my job is in this season. We all know what craziness happens in December. All the “to-do” lists, the racing and juggling and just plain

insanity that takes over this time of the year when our faith is calling us to something completely different.

You see, in our human minds the words preparation and get ready seem like action words to us. We have to be doing something. Running around like chickens with our heads cut off seems productive in some crazy way to us. “Look what I did today! I ran here, I ran there, I checked off all the items on this list, now I am ready for the next one. I am running myself crazy! I’m doing a lot to get ready for Christmas! Yay! Yay! Yay!

But that is not the message of Advent. There is a lot of work taking place. But we aren’t the ones doing it. In the psalm we read today from Luke is a part of the song Zechariah sang at his son, John the Baptist’s, birth. *“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.”*

John’s action was to let everyone know about salvation, to give us the knowledge we need to understand something spectacular is happening in us. The message he brings is for us to watch out, wait, in a sense be still and let God do God’s work of plowing and turning over and changing us, preparing us for salvation.

Our job is to be human beings, and the focus is on being. We are in a sense pregnant with the Spirit of baby Jesus inside us. Instead of worrying about all the human “doing” this world tells us our worth depends on, we are to be still and be incubators of new God given life growing inside us. Anything we do is to come from being God’s vessel, first.

This is how Zechariah explained how this work is done by God in us again from his song in Luke. I’m using the passage from the Message Bible. *“Through the heartfelt mercies of our God, God’s Sunrise will break in upon us, Shining on those in the darkness, those sitting in the shadow of death, Then showing us the way, one foot at a time, down the path of peace.”*

The path of peace. This is the second Sunday in Advent. We lit the Peace candle this morning. How in the world can we even think about peace this week, with yet another deadly shooting here in the US. What kind of action are we to take onestep at a time? Is God showing us the way to peace?

Do we go on attack? Do we send hate messages and stir up fear and hatred? Do we throw all foreigners either out of the country or in concentration camps? (Before you answer that one, think for a minute, unless you are 100% Native American, you are a foreigner. Our ancestors come from the far sides of the world.)

Or do we remain complacent and just not watch the news. What action do we take one step at a time for peace under these circumstances this week? My point is, there is work to be done by us, but for our work to be effective, it has to come from God working and showing us one step at a time.

Martin Luther understood this. And he recognized that it is when it seems the most work needs to be done that we must stop and wait and listen to God’s heart. This is what he had to say about the urgent work he was doing to change the world, *“Work, work, from morning until late*

at night. In fact, I have so much to do that I shall have to spend the first three hours in prayer.”

In other words, the problems we face today are so horrific, there is so much work to be done for God's kingdom that we are too busy not to pray. And then from that time of prayer, that preparation, or advent, we follow God, one step at a time. The scripture says, “one step at a time,” because that is all we can take. It is very scary following God down the path of peace. Because in order for peace to come, there's a lot of nasty stuff God wants to get rid of. We are God's hands and feet and we are called to tackle injustice, corruption, terrorism, violence, racism, bigotry, hatred, intolerance... It's overwhelming isn't it? That is why this preparation time, this pregnant time is so important.

Here at Grace and Peace we are saying yes to some amazing causes in God's kingdom. The work we do at the Mission of Grace is powerful. Feeding and tending to and loving the very poor is God's work and we will fail at it if we don't keep an open line between us and God. We are too busy not to pray.

Our status as a Reconciling in Christ congregation calls us to reach out in productive ways to the LGBT Community. I talked to a young man last week who is rounding up people to help the LGBT campaign to get rid of laws that discriminate. He wants us to help by writing letters. We are too busy not to pray.

I am on the Pay Day Lending task force in the IK Synod. There are people taken advantage of when they are at their lowest. Much of the work of combating this injustice is praying. Praying for insight, praying for guidance, praying for patience... We are too busy not to pray.

Walking down the path of peace with God can be pretty overwhelming and it can seem like too much. We will panic if we try to do it by ourselves. This is why it is so important to listen to God's invitation especially this time of the year. “Listen, wait, watch, pray—

Yes, this is our pregnant season. It is the time of the year God goes out of the way to make us aware that we carry Jesus inside us. We are incubators of truth and peace. God yells at us this season, “Stop and Be! So I can work in you.”

In our Philippians text today Paul says in verse 6, “*I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ*”. Yep, God isn't finished with us. So, what do you say, we slow down, and be, and while we are at it, we can do this just like Paul did, thanking God all the way.

After my 50-minute conversation with Emily the other day, she calmed down and saw her blessings. She knew that the precious bundle inside her needs her to be. She thanked me and I think she went on to have a good day.

You know, I wonder, what would happen if we all took that much time talking to and thanking God? As Mother Theresa put it, “Prayer is putting one's self in the hands of God.” That is how we are created to be. Yes, we are too busy not to pray. Amen