

Second Sunday of Advent – C - 2016
December 11, 2016
Holy Spirit (HG)

Is 11:1-10
Rom 15:4-9
Matt 3:1-12

“BOTTLES AND CANS”

I. The other day I was out driving around and pulled up behind a truck with a sign which read, “Dyersville Redemption Center.”

- I wondered to myself, “What do they “redeem?”
- back in the office I looked them on the Internet where I learned they “redeem” bottles and cans
- a little further research on the Internet surfaced a number of “redemption” centers in our area. Most of them “redeemed” bottles and cans; it appeared a few of them redeemed other recyclables as well
- “bottles and cans” – something seemingly worthless...I know of people who throw them away...but apparently they do have value...otherwise these “redemption” centers would not stay in business
- now apply this image to us – as disciples of Jesus...

II. God has come to *redeem* us – and Advent could be considered a kind of liturgical redemption season – or perhaps a liturgical Global Positioning System: if we get off course, Advent can help us “recalculate” and get back on track.

And we are not worthless junk...we have far more value than a nickel can or bottle...in fact, we have so much value that the second person of the Trinity would dare to become one like us and “redeem” us through his own death and resurrection.

And God has come for all us – as St. Paul tells us in the second reading – Jews and Gentiles alike...so that we all “might glorify God for his mercy.”

III. John the Baptist is this Sunday’s messenger of redemption, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” John the Baptist calls us to reorient ourselves, to reposition ourselves and prepare a straight highway for the Lord’s presence in our lives.

And this time of year does seem to be a good time of year to straighten out our crooked paths, to clean up the mess, to do some spiritual house cleaning. The warm and fuzzy feelings of this season, the well wishes, the many good deeds we see around us can cause us to notice more clearly our shortcomings,

the ways in which we do not show the same good will to others. Daily we can learn of examples of people reaching out to others in need:

- providing help to the poor,
- toys for children,
- Christmas caroling to those confined to their homes or care facilities,
- special support to disabled veterans,
- giving trees for families in need,
- gifts to men and women in the service,
- Santa Claus visiting children who are ill...and on and on

Such examples can serve to shed light upon the sin in my own life – on the ways in which I hang onto my selfishness and self-centeredness.

IV. So, in what areas of your life – and my life – do we need “redemption?”

- is this the time to work on letting go of those old grudges we’ve been hanging onto for how many years?
- is this the time to forgive the disappointments of life, the hardships of life, the challenges you didn’t expect?
- is this the time to finally forgive that person – or, at least, take more steps to forgive that person who hurt you so deeply years ago?
- is now the opportunity to loosen up and get out of ourselves – to really take the initiative to reach out to others and not just think about it, but to actually do deeds of love for others?
- or is this the redemption season when you will *finally* work on some of those pesky little sins that never seem to go away: like office gossip, judging others, belittling others, lack of responsibility, unfair criticism, lying, impatience?
- or maybe also some of those big sins which will require a lot of effort and attention

Whatever it is, Advent can be a time to clean up some of the clutter in our spiritual lives – much like we might clean up the house for guests at Christmas.

V. Isaiah paints an idyllic picture of God’s reign: an image in which the natural world and the human world live in harmony – the wolf is a guest of the lamb, the leopard lies down with the kid, the calf and young lion browse together and a child guides them, the baby plays at the cobra’s den and the child lays his hand on the adder’s lair.

It’s a crazy idea. Or is it? Such images of an idyllic world serve to inspire us, to motivate us to work in that direction. It is not crazy to strive to live up to our God-given potential as persons baptized into the life of Christ. We are baptized,

after all, to live and to become saints! Why not respond to John the Baptist's call to repent, to clean up the clutter in our lives?

VI. We gather today in this "redemption center," this place of worship, to celebrate our redemption and to feel once again the tug on our heart to open up even more to God's love. And we have far more value than a nickel can: in God's eyes we are of immeasurable worth – so much so that God wants us to spend eternity with him.

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