

# AMONG YOU STANDS ONE WHOM YOU DO NOT KNOW

Lord of light, who sent the Baptist to offer hope and face the world's scorn: open our ears to hear the cries from the margins, exposing our fears, inciting our vision and calling us to a step of faith; through Jesus Christ, the one who is to come.

*A Collect for the Third Sunday of Advent, Prayers for An Inclusive Church*

## THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

DECEMBER 17, 2017

### ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

THE REV. RANDALL C.K. DAY, D.MIN., PRIEST AND RECTOR

#### THE GOSPEL READING: JOHN 1:6-8, 19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 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. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

#### **The light of Christ**

*~The Hengrave Community, England~*

If you can see the difference  
Between darkness and light;  
If you can feel the difference  
Between a hand that strikes  
And a hand that strokes,  
Then, whatever your condition,  
You can begin to know God.

I saw a puddle of mud  
Sun-struck and bright as  
the Star of Bethlehem,  
And I thought, even so,  
The light of Christ has come  
into the world,  
And wherever a man breathes,  
And a woman feels,

There is hope.

For those who have not heard  
the good news,

The hostile and unforgiving,  
The cold, lethargic, apathetic,  
The desperately unhappy,  
The evil, the mad

And all who are out of kilter  
with society.

For all these, and for us all

He died

And lives still.

Nothing, no one is hopeless,

All may be redeemed

from their darkness

By his light.

In the reading from John's gospel that we have just heard, John the Baptist says: "Among you stands one whom you do not know...."

The challenge for us in this moment and in every moment of our lives is utterly and exactly the same as it was in the moment, the precise microsecond in which John first took in a breath of the same air we are breathing now and opened his mouth.

The challenge is not whether we will strive and attain something good or whether we will resist something bad. The challenge is simple consciousness of what already and always is for us and for everyone.

"Among you stands one whom you do not know...."

Fr. Richard Rohr writes: "Objectively, we cannot be separate from God; we all walk in the Garden whether we know it or not. The branch that *imagines* itself to be separate from the Vine (John 15:1-8), *acts* as if it is separate from God. We call the result sin, but the real sin is the imagined state of separation. It is our own delusion and decision!

We came from God and we will return to God. Everything in-between is a school toward conscious loving."

"Among you stands one whom you do not know...."

Will we allow this reality in the world?

Don't answer too quickly as we can recall that both John and Jesus were, ultimately, *not* allowed... and so it is through the ages with either the people or the message calling humanity to the union we already have with God.

This is not about what most of religion becomes and is. Because religions suffer as they do from human influence and control, they come to look like us and they begin to purvey rewards and punishment in puny self-serving ways.

Fr. Richard again: "Once Christianity became a simplistic win/lose morality contest, we lost most of the practical, transformative

power of the Gospel for the individual and for society. I cannot state this strongly enough.”

“Among you stands one whom you do not know....”

And it isn't about bowing down to this one whom we do not know. The one whom we do not know is the full presence of God, the Sacred, the Divine, Undying Compassion, Loving Reality with whom we are ever fully and completely connected. How can we bow down, really, when we are already and always in God and have God within us?

So the one whom we do not know is ourselves.

*And* the one whom we do not know is the One from whom we cannot be separated.

And while John speaks of the one whom we do not know, we do actually know. *We do* actually know. *We do actually* know.

And yet we are distracted over and over again, and not the least by religion when it becomes a thing in itself. In our consumerist culture we are bred to want or need, want or need, want or need – when we already have all.

All.

Can we allow all. The all of reality?

Or will there be no room in the Inn?

It's not just a fable told at

Christmas...

There is absolutely no need to exercise any effort to get ourselves into heaven or to avoid hell.

Prosecuting our self-interest, clutching our shopping lists with white knuckles is utterly wasted effort when it comes to God.

“Among you stands one whom you do not know....”

*All* is wrapped up and under the tree....

From God. In God. With God.  
For everyone.

And so to be one with God, as we are, is to be one with all others.

All others.

And all of reality.

So the sun-struck puddle of mud can, in fact, *does* offer you the star of Bethlehem....

And “wherever a man breathes,

And a woman feels,  
There is hope.”

We breathe, we feel in the world. Which is to say: in *this* world where things burn down and blow up, where we smash our heads and bleed on the door when we're looking for a way out or a way in, where we come home from shopping and realize we already have what we just bought, where we think we're alone, but reject the company of most everyone else, where we can't find 10 or 20 minutes to meditate

but can spend hours on screens,  
where we know that many hunger  
but we carry food to the trash day by  
day, week by week....

And in the midst of all this  
(and so much more) there is no  
rejection by God....

And God again and again,  
moment by moment sends  
someone, something to be John the  
Baptist for us with the awakening  
message of what we DO know:

“Among you stands one whom  
you do not know....”

All of God, as the Risen Christ  
reveals, all of each of us, all of all of  
us....

The theologian Sallie McFague  
writes: “In sum, we are not called to  
love God *or* the world. Rather, we  
are called to love God *in* the world.  
We love God *by* loving the world. We  
love God *through* and *with* the  
world.”

What will we let go so there is  
room in the Inn?

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