

The End of the World as We Know It, Part 3  
Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 and John 1:6-8, 19-28  
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Well, it's December 11. Only 13 more shopping days until Christmas. Is your Christmas joy crumbling yet under the weight of the expectations of the season? Are you feeling the pressure? Has panic begun to set in? Is it the end of the world as we know it? Run screaming!!!

Well, I actually hope you do feel like these are the last days, that the end of the world is coming, at least the end of your world as you know it, our theme for this Advent. But hopefully, that feeling is not coming as a result of the usual reasons we might feel stressed during this time of the year, the shopping, the parties, the family, but because you have been reflecting diligently on the texts for the Sundays of Advent, and you know what Messiah's coming means for you and for the world, that Jesus changes our lives, and the way we think, and act, and love, and shop, that Jesus brings an end to those awful delusions that we can handle it all, all alone; that we can satisfy everyone, all the time; that there is such a thing as a perfect gift, or a perfect Christmas. And hopefully you see that end of your world as you know it as good news, because it is, and not as something threatening.

A sense of threat was precisely what the Jewish authorities perceived coming from the desert in the person of John the Baptist. Anytime crowds occupy spaces where they are not expected to be, the authorities get nervous, start asking

questions. There was a crowd gathering in the desert, on the banks of the river Jordan, enough of a crowd to concern those whose job it was to be concerned about the status quo, and especially how it affected them, more specifically, how an end to the world as they knew it might negatively affect them and their finances and their security. And so, the priests and the Levites from Jerusalem are sent to ask John, “Who are you?” and the answer they got likely made them even more anxious, because it was not the answer they were looking for, or at least, it was not an answer as specific as they were looking for. All they got was a pointed reminder of the last time God’s people lost their way, and the promise of the coming of someone who would be even more threatening. All they got was the invitation to turn their own question on its head; to ask “Who are we?” rather than “Who are you?”

That they, and we, are called to ask the question, “Who are we?” should be evident in the fact that John was out there in that desert preaching repentance, an act which requires self-examination, and soul searching, and measuring ourselves up against the kind of person God has called us to be. The longer we focus on who someone else is, and how they should change, the longer it takes to figure out who we are, and how we should change. Of course, the questions “Who are we?” or “Who am I?” are not meant as substitutes for the question “Who is God?” Rather, they are complementary questions in our consideration of how we are doing on that road to righteousness. But “Who are we?” or “Who am I” are substitutes for “Who

are you?” and the clue to the value of these self-directed questions is that John answers them himself when he declares that he is nothing, that he is a no one. You see, he’s not really answering their question. He’s answering his own question. Not only does that self-declaration mean they shouldn’t even bother with asking him, but also that he has asked it of himself, and found the answer: one unfit to even untie the thong of Jesus’ sandal. John’s point should not be missed. We are all like him, unworthy to untie the thong of Jesus sandal, and yet, we are able to recognize him in our midst. John criticized those who could not see Jesus, even though he was already among them; shall we make the same mistake?

Advent is a good time to reflect on “who we are” in light of Jesus already being among us. Is our relationship to him, is our posture, one that suggests that for all our gifts of intellect and ability and capacity to shape our surroundings, we are still humble ourselves? Remember that to untie someone’s sandal was the ultimate act of servitude, and that the only value of the thong, the strap, was to make sure the sandal did not fall off. So, John considers himself unworthy to touch even the least important part of Jesus’ shoe. To paraphrase it in today’s words, he might say, I am not worthy to scrape the gum off the bottom of his shoe. Later, there would be those who would have given anything to scrape the gum off of Jesus’ shoe, those in need of healing, and also those who wanted to make sure it was Jesus who felt the bottom of their shoes. But for now, there is that initial posture of humility that must carry us forward in any season of our lives, Advent included.

On this third Sunday of Advent, as we prepare for Christmas and the celebration of the birth of Jesus, we rejoice in the birth of another mother's child. Not long ago within our fellowship, a husband and a wife were waiting for their (to this point) first child to come into this world. Pregnancy can be a very uncomfortable time, a humbling time indeed - especially for the mother. However, among the many blessings of this nine-month wait is the reorienting of time, precisely what John the Baptist was inviting the world to do.

While what happens inside a mother before birth has a somewhat predictable timing, the truth of the matter is that a baby will not be born until the time is right. In the Bible, time is defined in two different ways. There is "chronos" or "chronological" time, which is governed by the clock or the calendar. Then there is "kairos" time, which is governed by God. It is, if you will, "pregnant time." In that time, things happen when they are ready, not one minute before or after.

The birth of a child, and the days which follow, reorients our sense of time. It is truly the end of the world, as the parents knew it. Our time is no longer only our own. It is now shared time. An infant is fed when she is hungry. A diaper is changed when it needs to be. A cry brings a response, no matter when it happens. For parents, these days can be very tiring, and very rewarding. Eventually, routines do develop (thank God!) and chronos time gradually takes over. However, it's

important that we not lose a sense of the kairos timing that needs to be a part of the nurturing of a growing child.

Yes, there is a somewhat predictable path that the development of a young person takes on the journey to adulthood and beyond. However, things happen when the time is right. Each child develops in her own way, in his or her own time, or should we say - in God's time (kairos). We need to remember this - as parents, as family, as church - and "wait upon the Lord" as we help our children to grow.

It's time tonight to dedicate one of these precious children to the Lord. Fy and Darwin, would you bring Daniel forward? When we dedicate a child, we also dedicate ourselves to the task of raising him or her, praying that God will protect, provide, and guide all along the way of her development as a man or woman-to-be, a man or woman of faith. Each child is a gift from God. Each one belongs to God, something we should never forget. Our children are not our possessions. God entrusts us with them for a season. All-too-soon, we will release them. But for now, we are blessed with their care.

Of course, parenting can have its uncomfortable times, and its moments when all you can do is watch and pray as a young person makes his or her own choices, trusting that he or she has been grounded in the example and teachings of his or her family and church. However, a blessing remains from the nine months of waiting for him or her to first enter this world - the blessing of kairos. It is ultimately God's time-frame that governs his or her world and yours. Therein we

find our hope. There should be a button on each child, that gets bigger every year, as others need more often to read it, and that button should read, “Please be patient with me, God is not finished with me yet.”

Fy and Darwin, God is not finished with you yet, either. With Daniel in your arms, I invite you now to speak your vows to the Lord.

Do you trust in the Lord to protect, provide, and guide you as disciple of Jesus Christ?

Do you promise to raise Daniel in a loving home where he may grow, as he is ready, into the unique person God has created him to be?

Will you, through word and example, teach him the way of Christ, and encourage him such that one day he may choose to follow Jesus as her Lord and Savior, being baptized, and fully participating in the life and work of the body of Christ?”

We are all curious to know who Daniel will become. We want to ask him the question, “Who are you?” and we can’t wait until he can answer. But just as important as knowing who he is, is being clear about who we are. And so we must be asking ourselves constantly, “Who am I? and Who are we?” so that we may be in the best position to guide him in answering those questions for himself. As we do that, we will be better able to make good on the promises we will speak tonight. Will you join me in speaking aloud that commitment?

You have offered your child  
to the strong and tender providence of God.  
We rejoice with you and give thanks  
for the gift of your child.  
We promise, with humility and seriousness,  
to share in your child's nurture and well-being.  
We will support, by our example and words,  
your efforts to provide a loving and caring home,  
where trust in God grows and Christ's way is chosen.  
Our prayers will be with you and for you.  
May our shared life and witness  
help make your task both joyful and fruitful.

Daniel Felipe Lopez, we dedicate you to the Lord. May all the resources of home, family, and church nurture you and encourage toward your own decision for Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Lord, thank you for Daniel. He is your child. Bless him all the days of his life. Give to his parents, his family, and his church what all need to raise him in the faith. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.