WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT WEEK OF DECEMBER 19, 2022

“CHRISTMAS BLESSINGS”

Grace and peace to you, DGCC Family.

As we enter the last week of Advent, Judy and I have our family in town so I will be taking the next two weeks off from writing devotionals. This week, I hope you enjoy some “reruns” from last year’s Advent season, and next week there will be no devotionals. See you in the new year as we take up the book of Romans! Until then, from Judy and me, we wish you the richest of God’s blessings this Christmas Season.

Monday

As we continue with the season of Advent, I would like to dial back the calendar a few thousand years and imagine what it would have been like to expect the coming of the Messiah before He actually came.

We in modern times live with the knowledge that Jesus the Messiah has come. That He was born of Mary, was the Son of God (and God Himself), died for our sins, and rose from the grave. The word Advent actually means that something has already happened, such as “the 20th century saw the advent of many technological advances.”

But what of the ancient Jewish people? They had no such knowledge. Whereas our faith rests on something that has already happened, their faith had to rest on something that was promised but that had not yet happened. For them, their faith had to rely on prophesy, that is, God’s word spoken through the prophets. So, for this week, we’ll examine four of these prophesies foretelling the coming of the Christ and how the New Testament says they were fulfilled. Let’s start with this, which is the patriarch Jacob’s blessings to his sons on his deathbed:

"The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his" (Genesis 49:10).

This sounds a bit cryptic, so let’s take it apart. The words “scepter” and “staff” refer to the ornaments of royalty. Only kings were allowed to carry a scepter. The “Judah” referred to here is the fourth son of Jacob. And the phrase “the obedience of the nations shall be his” is echoed in the prophecy of Isaiah: “and the government shall be upon his shoulders” (Isaiah 9:6).

So, what does all that mean and how is it fulfilled? Jacob is prophesying that the Messiah, here depicted as “the scepter,” “the staff,” and one to whom the nations shall be obedient, shall come through the line of his fourth son, Judah. Two thousand or more years later, God fulfills this prophecy, and with it, His promise. Luke starts with the genealogy of Jesus works backward:
"...the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah" (Luke 3:33).

Amazing. Two thousand years, from words uttered by Jacob in the desert to the birth of the Messiah. A promise foretold, and a promise kept.

My prayer for you today is this: during this season of Advent, rest in the steadfast assurance of Almighty God, depicted so beautifully, and so full of grace, with the birth of a baby, His baby, that first Christmas Eve.

IHS,
Pastor Lou

Tuesday

Greetings, DGCC Family.

Continuing with our brief look at Old Testament prophesies of Jesus, consider this, from the prophet Hosea:

"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" (11:1).

Ok, so what’s that supposed to mean? Well, it may not have much meaning to us, but it would have had lots of meaning to the Jewish people. Here’s why.

For the Jewish people, there would have been no greater illustration of slavery and freedom, bondage and redemption, than the imagery invoked by the nation of Egypt. Four hundred years of toil, captivity, and oppression. Generation after generation after generation. And then, God’s great liberating work through the Exodus, freeing the Jewish people from their captors, and destroying Pharaoh’s army in the process.

This image was steeped in Jewish history, culture, and thinking. Also, the Old Testament is filled with the constant reminder of God’s liberating work. For example:

“Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the LORD brought you out of it with a mighty hand" (Exodus 13:3); and

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God" (Leviticus 25:38).

In foretelling that His Son would be brought out of the land of Egypt, God is saying that once again He will free His people, but this time from a different kind of slavery. Here’s how Matthew records the fulfillment of this promise:

"So he [Joseph] got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son'" (Matthew 2:14–15).
Jesus coming out of the Egyptian wilderness boldly declares that just as He redeemed Israel from physical slavery, so does God now free us, if we follow Jesus, from spiritual slavery, the slavery that is caused by sin.

So this Advent season, go ahead, follow Him. Let Him lead you out of the wilderness, out of the desert, and safely, tenderly, into His arms so full of love and grace.

IHS,
Pastor Lou

**Wednesday**

Wishing you glad tidings of the season!

I love the parables. Stories are such a powerful way to make a point, especially when you consider that in the time of Jesus, and certainly before, most people were illiterate. That means that oral history was the way teachings were transmitted.

God, as the Creator of all things, including humankind, not only understood that, but created us in a way such that storytelling and parables would be one of the main methods by which Jesus would communicate with us. In other words, He wired our brains so that teaching through parables would “stick”. This was actually foretold through the psalmist:

"My people, hear my teaching; 
listen to the words of my mouth. 
I will open my mouth with a parable; 
I will utter hidden things, things from of old" (Psalm 78:1–2)

What beautiful words. God is saying that one day, His Son will teach us “hidden things” and “things of old,” through parables. Said another way, God created us so that when His Son came, our minds would be perfectly designed to learn about Him and His teachings through parables. This prophecy gets fulfilled as described in Matthew:

"Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: 'I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world'" (Matthew 13:34–35).

God designed us so that we can learn from Jesus about Him. So today, find a parable. Maybe start with the Good Samaritan. Pray for a fresh set of eyes, an open heart, and a curious mind. And see what your Savior has to teach you today.

IHS,
Pastor Lou
**Thursday**

Wishing you all the blessings of the season!

In addition to the parable, I love the miracle stories of Jesus. That Jesus would perform miracles was foretold through the prophet Isaiah:

"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.
Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert" (Isaiah 35:5–6).

Note the imagery here: The lame will not just walk, they will “leap like a dear,” the “mute tongue” will not just speak, it will “shout for joy.” God’s never simply meets our expectations. His blessings are always in abundance.

Note also that Isaiah starts this prophecy with the word “then,” meaning “at the appointed time.” With the coming of Jesus, “then” becomes “now.” Here’s what Matthew says:

"When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'

"Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me'" (Matthew 11:2–6).

And so it is. Physical healing. Spiritual healing. Good news proclaimed to the poor. Prophecy fulfilled, and God’s great promise realized in Jesus the Messiah.

I pray that this Advent season you take great joy and wonder in the greatest miracle of all: God with us, Emmanuel, Jesus, the Christ child come to redeem you, and come to redeem me.

IHS,

Pastor Lou
**Friday**

Happy Friday, everyone!

Here’s your Friday musical devotional. Turn up the volume and enjoy!

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uj1psts_qTc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uj1psts_qTc)

IHS,

Pastor Lou