



## Sermon for the 3rd Sunday of Advent, Dec. 12, 2021

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene Ernest Warner

[Zephaniah 3:14-20](#), [Philippians 4:4-7](#), [Luke 3:7-18](#), [Canticle 9](#)

May the grace of God bless all this Advent season. Amen.

I'd like to start with some definitions of words used during this season. The first one is Advent. It means the arrival of a notable person, thing or event, as in "the advent of television." A second definition is the first season of the Christian church year leading up to Christmas and including the four preceding Sundays, and a third is the coming or second coming of Christ. Christ comes from the Greek Christos, meaning "anointed one" or "one who is anointed."

The Old Testament is full of stories of prophets who anoint the Kings of Israel by pouring oil on their heads and calling them God's chosen ones. In the New Testament we find Mary anointing Jesus' feet with a costly ointment, perhaps in thanks for the gift of Life given to Lazarus. Her act also acknowledges the power of God that Jesus demonstrates in his ministry.

Who today might we call "the anointed one" or "God's chosen?" The Hopi might shed some light on this. The Hopi, a peaceful people who are native to the Southwest, have a great respect for their tribal beliefs and are well known for their Kachina Dolls. The following narrative, from the Hopi, speaks to the waiting and the moving forward.

You have been telling people that this is the Eleventh Hour, now you must go back and tell the people that this is the Hour. And there are things to be considered...

Where are you living?

What are you doing?

What are your relationships?

Are you in right relation?

Where is your water?

Know your garden.

It is time to speak your truth.

Create your community.

Be good to each other.

And do not look outside yourself for your leader.

Then he clasped his hands together, smiled, and said, "This could be a good time! There is a river flowing now very fast. It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid. They will try to hold on to the shore. They will feel they are being torn apart and will suffer greatly. Know the river has its destination. The elders say we must let go of the shore, push off into the middle of the river, keep our eyes open, and our heads above the water.

And I say, see who is in there with you and celebrate. At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally, least of all ourselves. For the moment that we do, our spiritual growth and journey come to a halt.

The time of the lone wolf is over. Gather yourselves! Banish the word 'struggle' from your attitude and your vocabulary. All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration.

We are the ones we've been waiting for.

(Hopi Elders' Prophecy, June 8, 2000)

Perhaps we are the ones that are being called this Advent season, along with the Hopi, and others in creating a greater community. But can we respond to that calling? What stands between us and our response, slowing or preventing our action?

Today's Collect speaks of a fearful people, "We are sorely hindered by our sins" —by contrast, the Old Testament reading promises "The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love." And the words of Canticle follow with "Therefore you shall draw water with rejoicing from the springs of salvation."

Compare the last portion of the Hopi writing "All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration." to today's Epistle. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone, the Lord is near. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Our faith calls us to follow Jesus' footsteps, doing justice, having mercy, attending the sick, visiting the lonely, helping the poor. But our belief also tells us that Jesus could work miracles. What can we do?

The answer might be in the Gospel reading. John the Baptist, perhaps reflecting his upbringing in the wilderness, says to the crowds coming to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" He tells them they need to bear fruits worthy of repentance, having Abraham as their ancestor is not good enough. In fear and confusion, they ask him "What then shall we do?" Here is where John's gentleness is shown. He does not ask the impossible of them, but rather asks their attention to the ordinary affairs of everyday life--sharing with those who are in need, being fair in their dealings with others, being satisfied with what they are given and not to use their stature to take advantage of others. These are easily within our reach, as they were for the crowds around John, but so often out of our minds. We can be so focused on our own shortcomings, of the maelstrom that surrounds us, that these thoughts become idols between ourselves and God, crowding out any time we might have for others, or for our own faith.

When I was young, a lumber store in Salmon, Idaho had an HO scale race track set up in the front of the store on sheets of plywood and sawhorses. Of course, the owner also sold the cars that were needed so you could race around the track. It was quite a hit with the kids around the area. The tracks were electrified and you could maneuver cars around them by controlling the amount of current the track was getting. Too much going around a corner and you wrecked, too little and the other racer won.

An Uncle had given me a tin of his pocket change for my birthday. There was just enough for a new race car I had been eyeing at the store. I put all of the coins in a marble bag and was riding my bike to the store to purchase that car. On the way I got a flat tire, so I stopped at the local gas station--in those days the attendants would help a kid whose bike had a flat tire. I had the bag of coins in one hand and was trying to help when the attendant said to me "You could be of more help if you put that bag down." I did as he asked and was able to become helpful. I've never forgotten that. When my hands are full of myself, I am of little help to others.

When our hands are full of our fears and thoughts of our own affairs, when the world seems to be moving too swiftly, it can be difficult to find the ability or time to reach out to others, to let go of our concerns and help those in need. In the Hopi writing are the words, "There is a river flowing now very fast. It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid. They will try to hold on to the shore. They will feel they are being torn apart and will suffer greatly. Know the river has its destination. The elders say we must let go of the shore, push off into the middle of the river, keep our eyes open, and our heads above the water." As in the Canticle, these may be the moments when we draw the water from the springs of salvation, the springs that lie within us, ready to flow when we uncover them. John points out that it doesn't take miracles like raising Lazarus from the dead, we can discover the fullness of living by sharing what we have with others, by being kind and letting our gentleness be known to everyone.

The Hopi writing notes; "Where are you living? What are you doing? What are your relationships? Are you in right relation? Create your community. Be good to each other."

Now is the time to let this year's Advent light be lit in your heart, to let go of the fears that hold you back, to join in beloved community and let the anointed one be you. Amen