

Sermon for 13 December 2020 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Third Sunday of Advent/Gaudate Sunday

Scriptures: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 18-28

“Ego”

I apologize for starting with a clumsy bid for your attention with my sermon title: “Ego.” In high school Latin class, I learned the word “ego” meant “I,” as in “Ego amo te,” “I love you.” When I went to the University of Texas, I read all sorts of things about the “ego” ... that combinations of instincts and mental constructs that make up our sense of ourselves, our defense mechanisms, and all sorts of other things both important and troublesome.

In this third Sunday of Advent, when we light a pink candle and celebrate the joyful part of waiting, getting ready, standing still in the dark but hoping for the light to come ... perhaps “Trust” is a better name for this Sunday than Gaudate, or “Praise.”

John the Baptist is the central character ... and yet he’s not. By the time the writer of the Gospel of John wrote what we call “The Fourth Gospel,” Jerusalem had been burned and beaten to the ground by the Romans, and all the communities of Jews who had lived and worshipped there had either been slaughtered or dispersed to other locations. John (the Baptist) was long gone, Jesus was long gone; and slowly, to the people who were building on Hebrew roots, or other connections, a distinct fellowship called “Christian,” the point of the Baptist was clear: He had been there not to build a movement, but to point to the hope, the trust, that we now call “church.”

Not even that. We point, not to the church, but to Jesus. We spend our lives discovering the inner peace, the wisdom or insight about living and dying, the tangible imagination that comes so naturally to us through the fellowship around Jesus. Other faiths express deep spiritual truth in other ways .. but we find, over and over, the beauty and helpfulness of God as a human being such as we ourselves are, close to us.

All that is established on this third Sunday of Advent. John is clear. He is not God. He is not even God’s human likeness. He is the announcer.

That is where “ego” comes into the picture. We say we’d fall apart if we didn’t have egos; but in the modern world we know all sorts of troubles connected with an ego. I over-emphasize the importance of controlling my life, of insisting you hear my feelings, of winning against you, owning more than you.

I’m groping here. I want to be grateful for ambition, and skill, and yes, sex, and strength, and imagination ... all those things that build and grow as long as I live, that fit me into this beautiful world, that go to form my ego.

But I do want to say that I find our time particularly focused on I can’t say this right ...

Selfishness. Lack of imagination not just for other people and the animals and plants and all we call "Nature," but for the whole big "system" we're a part of, which in my experience includes what I call God. More and more, our time seems to explain things without reference to the work, the presence, the reality, of God.

John came to announce that a fresh and expanded experience of being a self was on the way ... And then John got out of the way.

Ego.

Can you imagine what it would mean to use your whole ego, not to amass stuff or skill for yourself, but for everybody and everything, because it's all connected, and sooner or later being helpful is the most intriguing part of having an ego? What if all these problems we're facing this year are connected? What if God wants to love us, and talk to us, and be increased by our uniqueness? What if the biggest point about "now" is how much we have a chance to change for the better? Not to make it mine, although owning and marrying and raising and expressing and sewing and saving and painting and ... all those things that appeal to us to do and to become, are great because they, as my grandmother would say, they get us up off of our honkers and into the swim of things ... but the whole show is so much more than "I" or "my" ...

We are learning that native peoples have a better sense of the connectedness of everything than we educated, differentiated, competitive people do.

But don't get me started on that. Just sink down in the soft cushion of our Mother and Father ...because God is both ... We as humans are both masculine and feminine, and we're just recognizing the oneness, the unity, the essentialness, of having both sides within ourselves... just be still and comfortable in trusting that "All shall be well," that "nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord," as St Paul puts it ... that we really can connect with peace, any time, anywhere ...and that even when we can't for awhile, even working in the dark, facing our trouble instead of running away from it, can bring us closer to God ...that God wants to cooperate with us in making good use of terror and depression and anger and fear and uncertainty ... that it's all part of creation, and God is in all of it, and communication is possible, often without a word being said...

"Ego." Love it. Let it go. Watch the other fellow's ego, don't hate it even as you don't hate yours. Help put limits around it, of course. Help others do the same. Fair's fair. Justice is love in action, as the saying goes.

Today's good news is the character of John, who came to bear witness to the light. That's our work, and our pleasure, forever and ever. To have and enjoy, but not be only, ego.

Through Jesus Christ,

Amen.

