

Third Sunday in Advent December 11, 2016

LUTHERAN

LIVING THE ^ LECTIONARY

*A weekly study of the Scriptures for the coming Sunday since May 4, 2014.
An opportunity to make Sunday worship more meaningful and to make the
rhythms of the readings part of the rhythms of your life.*

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“Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Parma” or “Harold Weseloh”**

December 8, 2016 (Thursdays at 10:00 AM)

Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 7500 State Road, Parma, OH

(Presented as a part of the bible study/worship midweek service (currently on Fridays at 7:00pm) in a house church setting, a newly formed assisted living site and used by Lutherans in Africa.

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<http://carolinasnalc.org/page/83/>

Hymn of the Day

Lutheran Service Book (LSB) 345 The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH) 60

“Hark, a thrilling voice is sounding”

“Scripture References: st. 1 = Rom. 13:11-12, st. 2 = 2 Pet. 1:19, st. 3 = John 1:29, st. 4 = Luke 21:25-28, st. 5 = Rev. 5:13

Although earliest manuscript copy dates from the tenth century, this text is possibly as old as the fifth century. It is based on the Latin hymn 'Vox clara ecce intonat' and its 1632 revision "En clara vox redarguit."...

...The hymn is most useful for Advent because it permits various interpretations of Christ's coming. Stanzas 1-3 contain references to Christ's first coming, but they can be used to celebrate his second coming as well. Stanza 4 surely refers to the second coming, and stanza 5, the only stanza addressed to God, is a doxology.

Liturgical Use: During Advent for worship services that stress Christ's second coming; use stanza 5 as an Advent doxology. --*Psalter Hymnal Handbook*"

http://www.hymnary.org/text/hark_a_thrilling_voice_is_sounding

The Holy Bible, [English Standard Version \(ESV\)](#) Copyright © 2001 by
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Next Week, Isaiah 35:1-10; RCL, the same reading (Isaiah 7:10-17; RCL, verses 10-16) The first reading will be from Isaiah through January 22.

The Ransomed Shall Return

35 The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus;
² it shall blossom abundantly
and rejoice with joy and singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the LORD,
the majesty of our God.

³ Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.

⁴ Say to those who have an anxious heart,
“Be strong; fear not!

Behold, your God
will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.
He will come and save you.”

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;

⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool,

and the thirsty ground springs of water;
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

⁸ And a highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;
the unclean shall not pass over it.
It shall belong to those who walk on the way;
even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.^[a]

⁹ No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.

¹⁰ And the ransomed of the LORD shall return
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain gladness and joy,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

a. [Isaiah 35:8](#) Or if they are fools, they shall not wander in it

Psalm 146; RCL, Psalm 146:5-10 or Luke 1:46b-55 (Psalm 24; RCL, Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19)

"Each of these last five psalms begins and ends with the words, "Praise ye the Lord" (KJV), "Praise ye Jehovah" (American Standard Version), "Praise the Lord" (RSV, the Good News Bible), or "Praise the Eternal" (Moffatt). All of these renditions are derived from a single Hebrew word, "Hallelujah". All of these are called "The Hallelujah Psalms."

There is a double emphasis in the psalm: (1) an admonition not to put confidence in men; and (2) an emphasis upon trusting in the Lord. This stress of both negative and positive elements is characteristic of practically all Biblical teaching. Even the Sermon on the Mount carries a heavy charge of both elements." <https://www.studyLight.org/commentaries/bcc/psalms-146.html>
Coffman's Commentaries on the Bible

Put Not Your Trust in Princes

146 Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

² I will praise the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

³ Put not your trust in princes,
in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

⁴ When his breath departs, he returns to the earth;
on that very day his plans perish.

⁵ Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
 whose hope is in the LORD his God,
⁶ who made heaven and earth,
 the sea, and all that is in them,
 who keeps faith forever;
⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed,
 who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;
⁸ the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
 The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
 the LORD loves the righteous.
⁹ The LORD watches over the sojourners;
 he upholds the widow and the fatherless,
 but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

¹⁰ The LORD will reign forever,
 your God, O Zion, to all generations.
 Praise the LORD!

“A Closing Quintet: Psalms 146-50

Psalms 138-145 make up the final collection of psalms marked "Of David" in the Psalter. The collection concludes with the promise, "My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD..." (145:21). Psalms 146-150 then express that praise, each psalm beginning and ending with "Praise the LORD!" (in Hebrew, "Hallelujah!"). This quintet closes the entire Book of Psalms.

The circle of those invited to praise in this closing quintet is continually expanding. First, the individual calls himself or herself to praise ("O my soul") and resolves to do so (146:1-2). Then the call goes out to the people of Jerusalem (147:12) or Israel (149:2) to praise. Finally, the quintet closes with an invitation to "everything that breathes" to join in the praising (150:6).

The structure of Psalm 146 exhibits the usual two-part pattern of the hymn. Psalm 113 is a good example of that pattern, with a *call to praise* (1-4) followed by *reasons* for praising (5-9). Psalm 146 begins with a *call to praise* (1-2) and supplies a number of *reasons* for praising (5-9). Verses 3 and 4 insert some words of *instruction* (3-4). Verse 10 consists of a confession of faith and a final call to "Praise the LORD."..."



https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1469
 Limburg, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn.

[James](#)

James 5:7-11; RCL, verses 7-10 (Romans 1:1-7; RCL, same reading)

“In the third Sunday of Advent, the epistle reading shifts from Paul’s letter to the Romans, to the Epistle of James. Paul and James have often been contrasted with each other, particularly in regard to their attitudes towards the relationship between faith and works. Yet both are concerned with the unity and health of their congregations.

Paul warns against aspects of the Mosaic Law that divide Jewish and Gentile Christians, such as circumcision, food laws and Sabbath observance. James also is concerned about divisions between members of the assembly of faith, but the divisions that worry him are between rich Christians and poor Christians. He warns against favoritism towards rich church members (2:1-9), slander (3:1-12), greed, violence and fraud (4:1-3; 5:1-5). All of these warnings, addressed to everyone in the fellowship, and addressed specifically to the "rich" (5:1-6), precede the passage in today's lesson and set a context for the exhortation to "be patient" (5:7)..."

https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=11 **Susan Eastman**
Assistant Professor of the practice of the Bible and Christian Formation, **Duke Divinity School,**
Durham, NC

Patience in Suffering

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers,^[a] until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

- a. [James 5:7](#) Or *brothers and sisters*; also verses [9](#), [10](#), [12](#), [19](#)

“Many scriptural texts can be read in isolation of their context and still provide some meaning.¹ However, some texts, like these verses from James, benefit greatly from reading what precedes it (if not orally in the congregation then at least in the pastor's sermon preparation). James is looking forward, to the future, with hope. But what is this hope? And what does this hope mean for the community of faith on the Third Sunday of Advent?

The past two Sundays, the community has heard the readings from the final chapters of Romans where Paul is developing what it means to live like a Christian, led and molded by the Holy Spirit. Is James now proposing that we simply "hope" for some future coming, eyes directed heavenward, as if we did not have to be concerned about this life? Definitely not! The key passage that eliminates a pie-in-the-sky hope (waiting for Jesus to return on the clouds of heaven and make everything "right") is verse 9, "Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged." Our hope may actually be judged! What type of hope is James writing about, what type of hope will pass the judgment?

If we look at the preceding verses (especially chapter 4:11 up to our pericope reading), we discover some surprising statements. (Note: these verses do not appear in the Revised Common Lectionary though they are read in the Roman lectionary and the older Episcopal lectionary). The hope that James describes is not looking upwards to some heavenly salvation nor is it looking inwards to some spiritual illumination but it is looking the other, our neighbor, directly in the face.

And this looking is done in a non-critical manner (we are not judges of the law, 4:11 -- can this person be useful to me? Does he/she fit my definition of a human being, etc.). It is not done in self-interest: engaging activities simply for the sake of making money (4:13-15). These verses are like echoes of the Sermon on the Mount. We come to the realization that James is probably heavily influenced by both Jesus' Sermon and by Paul's interpretation. Why worry about tomorrow? (Matthew 6:34). The hope that is proposed is a hope that is grounded in the Lord and on what the Lord desires. The focus of this hope is not ourselves (whether we are gazing outwards or inwards) but the Lord and how the Lord wants us to live in this life.

This perspective is doubly underlined in the verses of chapter 5 that introduce our pericope. The objects of worldly hope are squarely condemned. But here, it is not a matter of judging from personal prerogative or prejudice. It is a matter of justice for those less fortunate, for the workers, the ones without privilege. Has the neighbor been "loved" as much as self?

Now, perhaps, we can understand better the "be patient... until the coming of the Lord."...

...The example James uses is one familiar to each of us. Today's Gospel though gives another, more pertinent example. John the Baptist is imprisoned. He does not know what is happening. He does not know his end. He preached repentance and like many prophets he was rejected. He now waits and in his waiting he wonders: is this Jesus the one? John the Baptist exemplifies this patience lived in faith, the patience of "not knowing." It should also be noted that Jesus' response (about the blind seeing, the lame walking, the lepers being cleansed) clearly directs John's hope in an earthly direction! John need not look for fireworks in the sky. The signs all have to do with the well-being of the other, the wholeness of creation and justice.

"Strengthen your hearts...", James continues. This strengthening of the heart comes as the community lives and witnesses together. The patience in suffering is lived together as members of the community of faith watch over and care for one another. No words of slander, no grumbling, no back-stabbing, but always speaking and doing the good for the neighbor. In fact, it would seem that a characteristic of this patience is precisely a deep compassion and love towards the other as if James is writing, "slow down, seek first the kingdom of God, be attentive to one another, let all things happen in and for God, then all else will be given, God will grant all in God's time."

What is clear, of course, is the centrality of the Word of God. None of what James proposes here is possible through human strength, will or power. The patience and the hope are both grounded in faith, that gift of the Holy Spirit. Both have been given to the community, both however need to be nurtured, encouraged, formed. Isn't this what James is attempting throughout his letter?"

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3113 **Dirk G. Lange** Associate Dean; Fredrik A. Schiotz Chair of Missions and Professor of Worship, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn.

“The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 11th Chapter”

“Glory to You, O Lord”

“While in the Matthean lection for the second Sunday in Advent, we hear about John's testimony to Jesus, in this lection for the third Sunday in Advent we hear about Jesus' testimony to John (see verse 11).

Actually this lection should include Matthew 11:12-15 as well, which is the rest of Jesus' testimony to John, and in terms of contextual exegesis, it is important that verse 11 be interpreted together with verse 12-15. There is heavy irony in this passage because while Jesus is praising John to the sky in this text (“the greatest man ever born of woman”), John is expressing doubts about who Jesus might be. The question is what had prompted the question-- “are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” What John seems to have not yet understood is that Jesus did not come to meet our expectations as to what a messiah or savior ought to do and be, he came to meet our need... The undercurrent of the entire text is the difference between people's expectations, even John's, and the reality of who Jesus was and the actual character of his ministry.”

https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=778 **Ben Witherington** *Amos Professor of New Testament for Doctoral Studies, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky*

This introductory commentary points out the difference between the Lutheran Lectionary and the Revised Common Lectionary. It also gives you an opportunity to see “Matthew” as an adjective. Can you find it?

Matthew 11:2-15; RCL, verses 2-11 (Matthew 1:18-25; RCL, same reading)

² Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” ⁴ And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers^[a] are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ What then did you go out to see? A man^[b] dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. ⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet?^[c] Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is he of whom it is written,

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way before you.” (Malachi 3:1)

¹¹ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence,^[d] and the violent take it by force. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, ¹⁴ and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear,^[e] let him hear.

- a. [Matthew 11:5](#) *Leprosy* was a term for several skin diseases; see [Leviticus 13](#)
- b. [Matthew 11:8](#) Or *Why then did you go out? To see a man...*
- c. [Matthew 11:9](#) Some manuscripts *Why then did you go out? To see a prophet?*
- d. [Matthew 11:12](#) Or *has been coming violently*
- e. [Matthew 11:15](#) Some manuscripts omit *to hear*

“This is the Gospel of the Lord” “Praise to You, O Christ”

“John's question is really the question for hearers of every age. More clearly than perhaps any place in the gospel, the writer fairly leaps over the characters on the stage of the narrative and places the question smack-dab in our own laps. What will we make of this Jesus? Is he indeed the Messiah? For us? If not, how will we be opened to hear and see him as Messiah in such a way that he becomes the very reality of God's blessing in our lives?”

Living in the midst of Advent, perhaps the question is premature. Along with John we say, "Give us more data." But when the kingdom comes it is not a matter of more data. We pray, "Let your kingdom come." Martin Luther says, "God's kingdom comes on its own without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come to us" (Small Catechism). Luther elsewhere says it is not enough to preach the works, life, and words of Christ as historical facts; rather Christ needs to be preached so that he becomes Christ for you and me (Freedom of the Christian). How will we read and hear to that end? Here, then is the deep question of faith, the leap from unbelief to belief, and the mystery of God's kingdom at work in us.

John's question is also the great "why?" Last Sunday, we listened to John's preaching and to his expectations that this coming Messiah would really "clean house" (3:11-12). Now John is in prison, and we might be forgiven if we join him in his questions. If this Jesus is really the good news of God, then why is there still so much suffering and pain, evil and destruction, or hurt and brokenness among God's creation? The answers lie in our imagination and vision. What do we expect to see in this Messiah? And what will we make of him?..."

https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=12 [James Boyce](#)
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