

Hearing the Word

Second Sunday of Advent, Year C – Luke 3:1-6

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson December 9, 2012

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

It happened to me again. I'm not sure why it seems to surprise me every time, but it does. Yesterday I ran into the Wal-Mart to pick up a couple of things – actually trying to get a digital copy of the last of the Harry Potter movies. Oh, and I picked up some Christmas candy – well... just because. Of course, as anyone knows who has spent any time out there – or in any of our other fine shopping emporia here-a-bouts, for that matter – and as I intimated in last week's sermon – Wal-Mart is *ready* for Christmas. Actually, I think Christmas took over at the Wal-Mart before they cleared out the Halloween costumes. Anyway, I had just run in there to do my little bit of business so I could get back in time for the Army-Navy game (We lost again!) when the full force of the holiday crush hit me and hit me hard.

Jenny can tell you that this sort of thing happens to me every now and then. For some reason, every so often when I am stuck in the middle of a crowd of people, I just kind of... zone out. My hands get all clammy, my breath gets a little short, my eyeballs kind of glaze over, and everything sounds like some sort of fuzzy echo. At least that's what it feels like from the inside. Well, there I was in the middle of electronics, having just completed the work that had kept my focus up to that moment, when, like I said, the full force of the holiday crush hit me. I was left standing dumbly in the middle of an aisle that was way too small to begin with when it suddenly began growing smaller by the second. The thousand and one conversations that buzzed around me blended with the beeping of registers and the popped-up version of Christmas Muzak that has taken over the PA systems lately to blur into a monolithic, maniacal mash of white noise. For a brief moment, I considered dropping everything and getting the heck out of there, even *without* my candy, but my fuzzy head had not yet reestablished communication with my feet.

And then through the haze came a voice, sharp and clear. As a cart squeaked and squeezed by me in the aisle with a murmured "excuse me," the voice of a three-or-four year old seated in the bottom of the cart – in my haze I wondered briefly if it was the *same* child I mentioned last week – that clear, sharp voice cut through the chaos and the cacophony, this time singing: "Away in a manger, no crib for his bed, the little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head." I have no idea how much more of that song that little one knew. But as her momma's cart wheeled around the corner, I knew that that much of it... was *enough*. The fog lifted, I found some Christmas tree shaped Reese's Cups and headed for the final obstacle of the check-out line, and I realized that, in one way or another, the same thing happens to me every year at this time.

I start *off* wanting Advent to be what it was *meant* to be. I start off wanting it to be a time of genuine preparation for the coming again of Christ into my life. I start off wanting Advent to be a time of new and fresh reflection on the depth of God's love. I start off wanting Advent to be a time to see with new eyes the mystery and the glory and the *wonder* of Incarnation, to hear with new ears the amazing improbability that the eternal God of all creation would become finite and fixed and *fragile* – for *me*.

But then along comes the joy of parties and dinners and visits with friends and family. Along comes the fun of shopping for the boys and Jenny, for family and in-laws. Along come the sound of Christmas carols and the sight of twinkling lights and the spicy sweet smell of holiday treats. Along come all the *other* sights and sounds of the holiday season – and I get fuzzy and distracted. The bottom line is that it's really *hard* to hear Jesus in the middle of the Wal-Mart. It's not impossible, mind you, but it's really, *really* hard.

In this morning's Gospel lesson, Luke tells us of all the kings and all the princes and all the high priests, and how the Word of God didn't come to a single one of those busy guys, or if it did, they didn't hear it. Instead, the Gospel says, the Word of God came to a shaggy prophet named John... out in the middle of nowhere. To hear the Word of God, John had to step away from all the distractions of the world, out of the Wal-Mart aisle, and into a place where the sound of the Word of God... could *reach* him.

If *we* are to have any chance to make Advent what it was meant to be, we need to step away from the bright lights and the music and the shopping aisles. If we are to let the Good News of the Incarnation reach us, if we are to let the Good News of the Incarnation *touch* us, we need to brush back the noise and the distractions. If we are to receive the Word of God, fresh and new in our lives, we need to make time and space for Advent to *happen*.

So this morning, at the risk of being branded some kind of liturgical innovator, I'm going to ask us to do something a bit out of the ordinary, something I think we don't do near enough of these days. Here and now, in the middle of our all-too-busy Advent, we're going to take a break, you and I. I'm going to ask us all to close our eyes, to bow our heads, to do whatever it *takes* to silence the busyness of our minds, and present our hearts, just... for this brief moment, to the Good News of Christ's coming.

<silence>

Come, Holy Spirit, come. In the midst of the hustle and bustle, and the clutter and the clatter of our lives, fill our hearts with *your* peace. In the stillness... and in the sweetness of *your* voice, help us to hear again the Word of God that gives us strength... that gives us purpose... that gives us love. Then come, Lord Jesus, fresh and new into each heart. We are here to listen. We are here... to *hear*. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Amen.