

Advent Midweek 3 – 2022

The Incarnation and the Kingdom of God ~ It Is Holy

Luke 1:26-38

John 18:33-40

Holiness is not a commodity. Commodity is defined as “a raw material or primary agricultural product that can be bought and sold, such as copper or coffee.” Holiness is not something that any of you can generate or barter for or bestow upon another individual. Holiness isn’t in any store, be it brick and mortar or online. Google can’t really help you find it. Alexa and Siri are useless in locating this divine reality. Curious then that holiness is the one thing that man needs.

If there is a more stark contrast between opposite realities then the Bible doesn’t know it – the contrast between what is holy and what is profane. All of the strongest metaphors are employed to explain this one contrast. “What fellowship has light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14). “What partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14). Ultimately, the contrast between what is holy and what is profane is a contrast between God and Satan. Funny, you can find what is profane in just about any store you care to visit. Online, profanity is marketed with boldness, naked simplicity, and unapologetic fervor. Welcome to the 21st Century. Do you value what is holy? Have you tasted what is holy? Does it suit your palate? Do you pursue what is holy with singleness of purpose? Are you capable of discerning the difference between what is common and what is holy? Do you guard what is holy, protect it from desecration?

Moses was told to put off his shoes. Moses did as he was told. If Moses had not, if he had refused, would he have desecrated God’s holiness or would he have profaned himself? Do you know why Moses was told to put off his sandals? Because where he was standing was holy ground. God’s presence had sanctified the place where Moses was standing. Moses had an interaction with holy God and holy God wanted Moses’ sandals off. Is this a holy space? I’m not suggesting that anyone take their shoes off, but the question remains: Is this a holy space? When we dedicated our remodeled church building, these were the first words that were spoken before we entered the nave: “Beloved in the Lord, Christ Jesus is present wherever His holy Word is taught purely and the holy Sacraments are administered according to His institution. As the Lord said through Moses, ‘In every place where I cause My name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you’” (Exodus 20:24b).

Men are not to wear hats in this place. Why? We aren’t to behave as though this is a Starbucks, swilling our coffee like we own this space or acting in a way that makes it seem that what takes place here is not different than what takes place in a cafe. The music that is played, the songs we sing, are they to have a different tenor than the pop culture sounds that fill the ears of society? Do you think that the culture around us has a regard for what is holy? Do you think that the society even cares that they don’t understand it? Why is a man not to unite himself to a prostitute? Why is adultery a sin? Why is taking the name of the Lord your God in vain a sin? Why is stealing a sin? Is it possible to desecrate yourself, desecrate those you sin against, desecrate God’s holiness which He has shared with you, which He has placed *in* you and *in* others?

From the time that I was in 9th grade until I graduated from college I made my home in the pigpen. I very deliberately, foolishly, saturated myself with what is profane. And God opened my eyes. Through His Word, and through His agent, God showed me what “holy” was, what holiness is. It was different from what I had known. It was light coming into my darkness. It was compelling, like looking at a great painting. But just by looking at a painting, you don’t enter into the painting. Holiness is something that pulls you into its reality. Holiness is designed to saturate your being, making you different. Scripture says that God became man so that you might *participate* in His divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). On this point, God is rather adamant: “Be holy for I am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). Some Christians believe that holiness is something that we achieve by our behavior. Imagine Jesus coming up to Lazarus’ tomb and calling out to him: “Hey, Lazarus, wake yourself from death and come on out here and stand before me; you can do it; c’m on now.” Imagine God speaking to Adam prior to breathing into Adam the breath of life: “Hey, Adam, wake up now, that’s a good boy, it’s time for you to rise and shine, you can do it, up, up, up.”

St. Paul wrote this: “So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me” (Romans 7:21). If you had to achieve holiness then you would be as impotent as Lazarus trying to rouse himself from death or Adam attempting to will himself to live. Pilate wanted to know if Jesus was a king. The Lord assured the Roman governor: “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). But the beautiful thing for us is that Jesus’ kingdom comes plowing into this world; His dominion is very much in this world; His authority is in this world; His grace is in this world; His holiness is in this world. God was made man so that God might share His holiness with you. That is true. Believe it. Jesus Christ is the intrinsic progenitor of the most sublime quality that humanity has ever known. He is holy; pure, unalloyed, delightfully and omnipotently holy. Holiness is not a commodity any more than Jesus is a commodity. Jesus is your God. And His Kingdom has come among us.

Gabriel told Mary: “...the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). God willed to come into our profane world to share His holiness. Holiness came into Mary’s flesh and took up residence. He does not protect Himself. Jesus wears no antiseptic gown to ward off our profane cooties. Jesus is the holy sacrifice which was offered up on the cross. His blood spilled on our ground. His prayer for forgiveness saturated our air. His holiness was so grand, so majestic and cosmic and powerful and unbounded and assertive that it shattered the kingdom of darkness. Jesus died bearing our sins. His holiness was intact, undiminished and at work precisely as He was mocked and pierced, precisely as darkness swamped Him. God’s love is holy. God’s life is holy. God’s Word is holy. God’s death is holy. God’s resurrection is holy. You need this. You are a creature of this profane world and you need God’s holiness more than you need anything else in all creation.

Would Jesus ever have even considered leaving Lazarus in the tomb? Would God ever even think to form Adam’s body and not breathe into him the breath of life? God will give you His holiness. What God demands, God provides. Through those means that are tethered to Christ’s death and resurrection, through those means that deliver Jesus’ holy sacrifice, through those means of grace God makes you holy. You were baptized, washed in Christ’s blood, washed in His holiness and no sin will take that reality away. You receive His body and blood and it invades your own body and blood in Holy Communion. His flesh becomes part of your flesh as

God incarnate comes to you in the Eucharist. The Lord Christ sanctifies you (Hebrews 2:11). His kingdom is a holy kingdom. God showed me what holiness is through a believer, a holy daughter of His who manifested His goodness in a common but unmistakable way. That is the church on earth; that is you to the world. Let your light so shine; let your holy light so shine in a good and common and unmistakable way so that others may see your faith, your holiness of living, your devotion to the Holy One and be drawn to Him who is the Light of the world (John 8:12). His light is in you (Matthew 5:14). His holiness is in you (1 Corinthians 1:30; John 14:20; John 17:23). His kingdom is in you (Luke 17:21). Christmas is all this and more. Christmas is to be celebrated. Christmas lifts us up and moves us forward. The Holy One has come to us.