

Sermon 24 December 2017  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent**  
Psalm 146:5-10; Luke 1:46b-55

The simplest of thoughts will suffice for this Sunday morning of Advent, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ tonight. Remember that Advent, like Lent, is a penitential season. It is not a season for shame—no time in our Christian journey is meant for shame. It is a season for determined reflection. In these dark winter days before the star over Bethlehem casts its brilliant light, we take time to think about our lives—where we are in time, in circumstance, and most importantly in our relationship with God. How are we living the gift of our days?

It is a season of penitence because we look straight into the mirror and—without excuse or justification—we take the measure of our commitments. We consider the quality of our values. What and who matters to us, what and who do we value above all else? How much of our time is dedicated to pursuing and living soulful, enduring values?

Advent is a time to unabashedly face ourselves, to see who we are, and to change course if we discover we are living below the spiritual poverty line, betraying our truest desires and highest aspirations. It is not a time for shame—but if we feel guilt for anything we have done or failed to do, it *is* a time to confess and receive God's quick and full forgiveness.

Advent is a time to discover, once again, the eternal youth of our souls, and to rise again to the struggle for dreams worth dreaming, and to give our attention and strength to tasks worth striving for. It is time to recalibrate our vision, to see beyond the temporary and live more for the things that endure.

This morning's reading from the Psalms and from Luke offer us the corrective lenses we need to see clearly, to recognize the things that matter—things that matter to God and to us, creatures made in God's image.

In Psalm 146, the singer chants a warning against putting our trust in the powers of the world. Leaders who conceive great things for themselves come to the same end as the humblest indigent.

*Their breath leaves them, then they go back to the ground.*

*On that very same day their plans die too.*

Do not put your trust in the promises of the world; they wither like grass in the scorch of time. But *the person whose hope rests on the Lord their God—is truly happy!*

Then we read the litany of God's goodness in the Psalm.

*God: who is faithful forever,*

*who gives justice to people who are oppressed,*

*who gives bread to people who are starving!*

*The Lord: who frees prisoners.*

*The Lord: who makes the blind see.*

*The Lord: who straightens up those who are bent low.*

*The Lord: who loves the righteous.*

*The Lord: who protects immigrants,*

*who helps orphans and widows,*

*but who makes the way of the wicked twist and turn!*

*The Lord will rule forever!*

Make no mistake—when the crooked way seems to be the most advantageous, when cutting a corner on truth or justice seems to be the easiest way to go—**the price is too high**. The price is too high for your character, too high for your goodness, too high for your dignity. That cost includes any chance you have for the profound peace that only the faithful know—peace of mind, peace of heart, peace of soul—the peace that gives you a quiet, serene conscience and the sleep of the innocent.

Turn to Mary's song of praise and hear the same themes reprised.

*In the depths of who I am*

*I rejoice in God my Savior.*

*He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts*

*and proud inclinations.*

(I really like that translation—*arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.*)

*He has filled the hungry with good things  
and sent the rich away empty-handed.*

*He has filled the hungry with good things.* We're all hungry and the good things God fills us with go beyond satisfying the grumblings of our stomachs. A feast of *good things* permeates the lives of those whose *hope rests in God*. The good things include things like *contentment, peace of mind, a clear conscience, joy in the everyday, beautifully ordinary gifts of life*—all such good things *and* the gift of *awareness* to recognize them for what they are when we have them, and not when it is too late.

Mary knows these things and she sings: *With all my heart I glorify the Lord!*

By the grace of God, we know these things too. The darkness of worldly delusion is behind us, and the light that comes into the world leads us in paths of truth and goodness, gratitude and joy, grace and love.