

Brothers and sisters of St. Jude/George – how quickly time passes. Here it is – already the 4th Sunday of Advent – and my final time to write you. I hope these weeks have been meaningful for you.

So Advent is a time of watching and waiting. A time of preparing our minds and hearts and lives to receive the Lord anew at Christmas. A time for slowing down and turning inward so as to fall in love with Jesus all over again.

There are certainly things that can slow this process down – and possibly block it all together. We have looked at some of them --- over the last few weeks:

Lack of focus and the lack of paying attention to what God wants to tell us and where God is trying to lead us – because we are too distracted by what the world is trying to tell us and where the world is trying to lead us.

Sin – and the inability for us to admit that we have fallen short of who we are called to be. The need to feel remorse or regret for what we have done and have failed to do in missing the mark of being like Jesus.

Doubt – about our need for a Savior, or in thinking we can be saved by someTHING rather than someONE. . . and also doubt about who we are and who we are called to be.

Our readings of Scripture during this season gives us one more stumbling block to an open heart to consider on this 4th Sunday of Advent --- and that stumbling block is --- FEAR. . .

Now we are certainly not the first to experience fear ---- when it comes to God’s call or God’s plan for us. . . .

When the angel Gabriel announced the good news to Mary that she would be the mother of God’s son, the angel said: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”

On the night Christ was born, angels appeared to shepherds in a field and told them: “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all people.”

Today, in the Gospel, it was Joseph who was experiencing fear – for an angel was also sent to him in a dream to say: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.”

Many times throughout his ministry Jesus had to calm the fear of his disciples and others. . .

What is with all of this fear??? I think it is because when God comes knocking at the door of our hearts – it will always mean a change is coming --- and let’s face it, not many of us like change –we like who we are and who we have become, we get comfortable where we are at --- and so we fear change.

What else do we have to fear when God comes a knocking – besides the fear of change?

How about fear of failure.

Or fear of success – that God will actually change us into the people we pray to be. . .

There is fear of losing control of our lives.

Fear of standing out in the crowd.

Fear of not fitting in.

Fear of rejection.

Fear of pain.

Fear of being asked to do something uncomfortable – or something we don’t really want to do.

There is the fear of losing our freedom.

Fear of looking weak, or funny, or silly.

Fear of losing status.

Fear of being made fun-of.

Fear of being misunderstood.

Have I hit any of your fears yet, or are these just some of mine?

Yes, when God comes knocking – there are lots of things to be fearful of . . . but remember what Jesus once told his followers: Perfect love casts out all fear.

If we love the Lord with all our minds, hearts, and souls – then God will deal with our fears – ***and*** our doubts, and our sins, and our distractions.

If we say YES to God – as did Mary, as did Joseph, as did the disciples --- God will place his spirit within us – not a spirit of cowardice – but a spirit that calls out, Abba, that is father. . .

Those who know they are loved – can do incredible things – and God is calling us to do incredible things! We do need to know that God definitely loves us – that’s why God has given us the gift of his son.

“And this is how the birth of Jesus Christ comes about ---- today” – by our kind words and generous actions. By others seeing us act as Jesus acted. Speaking as Jesus spoke. Caring as Jesus cared. Loving as Jesus loved. Giving as Jesus gave. In these ways, Jesus continues to be given birth. . .

So my final message to you is to --- open your hearts and let the king of glory in. Allow the Wonder-counselor, God-hero, and Prince of Peace – to be the focus of your life ----- and he will mercifully deal with all of your sins, all of your doubts and all of your fears. No ONE else or no THING else is going to be able to do this for you.

So my brothers and sisters, called to be holy and blameless before the Lord, I hope in some small way my words to you over these weeks will allow to do what you need to do---- to make room in for Jesus in your hearts. It won’t always be easy – if it was, everyone would be doing it. Know that you are special – because you have been chosen from the first moment of your existence to be a disciple of Jesus. So do your ministry with great joy and great conviction.

Remain faithful to God’s word and to the strength which comes to you in this faith community of St. Jude/St. George.

Someday I will pick up my quill again, and write you a few words of encouragement and challenge. But for now, I will always remain your brother in Christ, Paul.