

“What We Have to Offer is Pleasing”

2nd Sunday of Advent

Communion Sunday

December 5, 2021

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Iao United Church of Christ

Malachi 3:1-4

Luke 3:1-6

Poem: “One Day’s Service” by Amos R. Wells found in the Short Poems Website.

*“O to serve God for a day!
From jubilant morn to the peace and the calm of the night
To tread no path but his happy and blossoming way,
To seek no delight
But the joy that is one with the joy at heaven's heart;
Only to go where thou art,
O God of all blessing and beauty! to love, to obey
With obedience sweetened by love and love made strong by the right;
Not once, not once to be drunken with self,
Or to play the hypocrite's poisoned part,
Or to bend the knee of my soul to the passion for pelf,
Or the glittering gods of the mart;
Through each glad hour to lay on the wings of its flight
Some flower for the angels' sight;
Some fragrant fashion of service, scarlet and white--
White for the pure intent, and red where the pulses start.
O, if thus I could serve him, could perfectly serve him one day,
I think I could perfectly serve him forever--forever and aye!”*

G.K. Chesterton one time said, “Christianity has not been tried and found wanting. Rather it has been found difficult and not tried.” One would think that after more than two-thousand years of Christianity, that we would have finally gotten this “Christianity” religion down. Maybe, just maybe – calling it a “religious movement” has been the problem. You see beloveds, the early disciples did not call their movement “Christianity.” They were known as “people on the way.” This movement was focused on feeding, healing, transforming, and inspiring peoples lives. Especially those whom were forgotten out in the margins of society – the outsiders, the rift-raft, the less than kind of people. This new movement began from a simple, unique, kind, loving man that came to us as a vulnerable child out of a Bethlehem stable. Yet, eventually, this new movement was reduced to something that was not easy, a movement that was misused from its original call and intent – from its true meaning and purpose.

Questioning the purpose of this movement of Christianity helps us grow in faith, in wisdom and in understanding. Yet, the elites, those who think they hold all the keys, would not have us question their authority. It was profitable for many to move this new way of being a Christian, new way of being a Church to

impose rigid controls – so rules, regulations, protocols, and requirements of who is in and who is out changed the original purpose of why God came to us as a vulnerable child. The sale of Christianity became a wilderness kind of living. Paths became windy and valleys now required mountain climbing. What was once easy to understand – “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and with all your soul and with all your strength. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself” became riddled with – this is the proper way to pray. You must do this to be this, do that to be considered as part of us. A limpness test became the order of the day. Indulgences took hold and now Christianity was up for sale to those who could pay. This still seems to be what many face today – one must conform than to be transformed. The ordinary – the common man born at the stable in Bethlehem has become a profitable commodity for many.

I can still remember when everything was closed on Sundays. Many of us can remember those days amen...Church? Sunday was a time for gathering as a Church body. A time of rest. A time for family. The time of Advent was a time for preparation and remembrance of that Christ child in the stable. It was a time of self-renewal, of anticipation and of prayer. Now it seems to be a

season of shopping, a season of consumerism. The simple man, the unique man, the new man born as a vulnerable child in a stable – the Christ child, now represents profit, money, possessions which is out of touch and out of reach for many. Especially those who are already knee deep in debt, no home, having a hard time putting food on the table so they are forced to work seven days a week. What would “the people on the way” think about our current culture and current society beloveds?

A movement – a religion that says “you’re not good enough to join” will eventually die. There is nothing please about joining that kind of movement. The time, talents, and treasures had to be of a certain kind and for a certain amount. This season of Advent gives us a great opportunity to bring back the reason for this season in a new and transformative way. Gives us an opportunity to – as I mentioned last Sunday – to renew this church for the original intent of why we celebrate the Christ child in a manger. Not for the gifts we receive but for the gifts we offer. How we use this great opportunity to renew this church with simple, unique, new way of who Jesus was and is depends on our own testament of faith. Who is this Christ child for us today beloveds? We find ourselves in a time where preparation is at hand. A time where Christianity is

seen as a simple way of giving of ourselves and loving those around us. That who we are and where we are on life's journey and what we have to offer is enough. The message through John the Baptists still reminds us that Christ still is the refiner and purifier and perfecter of our movement, of our faith. What we do with that in our time is still unfolding. We may not yet know what this virus is going to do or how it is going to keep replicating. We must then be ready to replicate – adapt to whatever change comes...amen

Church? Here is a question for us to ponder this week, and this season and it's a hard one to answer – “If someone beyond these walls can call themselves ‘Christian’ and do all the things we claim to stand for – do all the things that Christ would do – then why is there a need for them to join this Church?” In trying to answer this question myself, I could only answer – “They need to see you beloveds. They need to see this Church in action. They need to be inspired by you. They need to be invited by you. And most importantly, they need to see authenticity – the authenticity of this church.” I am not sure if I even got close to answer my own question, but that is what came up for me in what this church has done in the past year and eight months.

Let us close with this beloveds. As we emerge into a “New Bethlehem ‘*kina*’ Church” – let us be that voice that calls out from our wilderness journeys. Let us clear the paths that have been riddled and filled with rules, regulations, requirements as a test of faith. What people have to offer must be enough and accepted. If one has abundance – share with those who are in great need, without question. Let God deal with those who take when they do not need – that is for God to deal with. Pope Francis’ words should resonate with us – “First, pray for the hungry – then we feed them – that’s how prayer works.” This should remind us to feed without question. That what we have to offer is pleasing. What we do does not harm others. May we find peace in the simpleness of why the Christ child came to us as a poor, simple, vulnerable child.

Amen, Amene, Ashe, A-ho, and Alleluia.