

WGUMC December 2, 2012 "What are you waiting for?"
Psalm 25:1-10 and Luke 3:1-6, 15-18

I love how the third chapter of Luke begins like the opening credits of a movie. We have all the big names in lights: the emperor, the governor, the vassal kings, the high priests. But the Word of God didn't come to any of them. It came to John, son of Zechariah, in the wilderness.

The Word of God is never general. It's always particular, coming at a particular time and to a particular person, and it's always personal. When the Word comes into history, it comes into someone's history, maybe our history.

Maybe it was our 15th year, or our 47th year, or your 93rd year; when FDR or Eisenhower or Reagan or Clinton was president; when Brown or Brown or Brown again was governor, but some of us remember when the Word of God came into our wilderness. Some of us are still there waiting.

John, son of Zechariah, was out in the wilderness, when the Word came to him. So he went to the people with a

warning: "Prepare the way of the Lord." And thus we traditionally begin the season of Advent, a season to prepare for the coming of the Lord not just into world history but into our own history. This season I'm preaching to those of you who may have been coming to church all your lives and wondering if you've ever experienced Christ coming into your life. I suspect that there are many who show up on a Sunday morning, thinking: isn't something supposed to be happening here?

Daring to ask that question is a first and most essential part of our preparation. If you want something significant to happen, you have to ask that question. And you have to be ready for the answer. As ready as Tony in *West Side Story*:

*Could be!
Who knows?
There's something due any day;
I will know right away,
Soon as it shows.
It may come cannonballing down through the sky,
Gleam in its eye,
Bright as a rose!*

*Who knows?
It's only just out of reach,
Down the block, on a beach,
Under a tree.
I got a feeling there's a miracle due,
Gonna come true,
Coming to me!*

*Could it be? Yes, it could.
Something's coming, something good,
If I can wait!
Something's coming, I don't know what it is,
But it is
Gonna be great!*

If you can wait for it. What are you waiting for? longing for? Ever since we left Santa Cruz almost ten years ago, Hank's been hankering after Bubba's Pickled Tomatoes. No one in Marin carried them. So, when we moved here last year, I went on a quest for Christmas. I found them at Lunardi's, bought a couple of jars and hid them in the refrigerator here at church. I had to come back in the middle of the night on Christmas Eve, so they would be under the tree on Christmas morning. "It's only just out of reach, down the block, on a beach, under a

tree."

But he's not the only one longing for something. Ever since leaving Marin, I've been yearning for cinnamon gelato, which was occasionally available at a shop in Corte Madera. I've looked and looked around here, but haven't been able to find it yet. So, this Christmas, I'm letting everyone know that "I got a feeling there's a miracle due, Gonna come true, Coming to me!"

Christ came to the people of Ancient Palestine because they had a feeling there was a miracle due, gonna come true. And none too soon, for they were sore oppressed by Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Philip, Lysanias, Annas, Caiphas—the whole lot of them. And so when John came, preaching that earthly kings would soon be at heel because God's kingdom was at hand, the people were filled with expectation.

If you want to meet Jesus, you have to be filled with expectation. I figure that's my biggest challenge: getting folks to want something they don't know they need. Unlike John, I

don't have a winnowing fork in my hand, and I'm not gathering you into my granary and threatening to burn your chaff with unquenchable fire. I'll let the Baptists do that.

It's not that I'm not concerned that you're sinning. It's just that I'm more concerned about what you're missing. Why settle for less than all the life God wants for you?

You've got to think of meeting Jesus like going on a first date. First of all, you gotta want it, to get it. When I met my husband, he was 47 years old. He'd never been married, never been in a long-term relationship. He had, in fact, seriously considered becoming a monk, but he couldn't give up the hope that one day he'd have a wife.

I was 30. I hadn't had a date since that disaster back in seminary. As a shy pastor who didn't drink and for many years couldn't drive, who worked nights and weekends, I didn't have much of a chance for a social life. How long I waited for a date on a Friday night.

So after the surgery, my counselor said to me: "Your seizures are gone. Take an *acceptable risk*." Based on her advice, I put an ad in the personals. Hank and 32 other men answered it. His was by far the most interesting letter I received, but I decided that he was too old for me, and I didn't respond. Eleven months later, I almost answered his ad, until I realized that it was the same old guy!

Finally, the New Year came around, and I realized that I needed a new strategy. So I wrote him a letter. We met at Starbucks. He asked me to the opera. The classics scholar who likes everything old and out of date, including clothes, came to my house to pick me up. He was wearing a jacket, tie and bright blue polyester pants (I swear I'm not making this up). When I told my sister about our first date, she said, "And there was a second one?" Yes, and a third and a fourth.

My friends, what I've learned in my life is that meeting your savior is not so very different than meeting your spouse.

First of all, you have to be hungry and you have to be ready. You have to take acceptable risks. You have to be willing to wait. And you can't expect too much from that very first date. But you have to keep showing up so your relationship with Jesus can deepen and grow. And you have to learn to laugh and learn to let go.

In this season of Advent, I'll have you know that Jesus is courting you. But I'm warning you: he's no typical suitor. And when he shows up at your place, I'm sure you'll be surprised. Have a good laugh. Live a good life.

Just remember that you have to want it to get it. The emptiness is something you have to feel before you can hunger for what is real. You have to get to know that hole in your soul so you can make some space for grace. I promise you that it's gonna be a whole lot better than pickled tomatoes or even cinnamon gelato. So you be thinking: *Something's coming, I don't know what it is but it is gonna be great!*