

Pastor Roy's sermon from December 20, 2015 (4th Sunday of Advent)

Children's: What do you call a pig who knows karate? A pork chop. Christmas is coming. Were pigs at Jesus' birth? We are collecting money so that we can give pigs to families in other countries who really need animals on their farms but don't have the money to buy them. Luke says Jesus was born in the place where the animals stayed. What kind of animals might there have been there. Would animals have been close to any other kings who were born in Jesus' day? What is different about Jesus when we say he is our King? Does he want us to do something for him, or does he do things for us? He teaches and shows us how to live. He is a good King.

Hebrews reminds us that Jesus came to do the will of God. And what is God's will? Is it what we feel we should do? Or is it full of surprises? Sometimes we feel intimidated by the will of God, that it is too difficult or frustrating to follow.

In the OT, the faithful first believed it was about sacrifices, appeasing God's wrath—surely God was angry with all the trouble the people of God had. Then they began to think of God's will in terms of good order in the kingdom of Israel. But the kings took shortcuts and appeared to mainly serve themselves with their politics and religion.

And then the prophets called for justice for the poor and common folk. And the kings were overthrown and the rich went into exile -- the poor were left to fend for themselves and tend what was left of the towns after the marauding armies had come through. A hazard of living along a major trade route. In exile the Jews formed synagogues and realized that more than all else they needed mercy. Some were guilty of spreading injustice. The poor needed help. Everyone needed mercy. Might God first and foremost be a God of mercy who calls us to rejoice in mercy?

Hebrews echoes that God's will is not about paying for our sins committed and our good *omitted*, God's will is mercy and love. God's will is courage to go on. . .with freedom when we truly encounter the abundant grace of God.

Jesus comes to spread grace. The message of Advent is to prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ into this world. To prepare for grace coming. To prepare for Grace. To prepare by finding grace within ourselves—gifts of grace. In this we have been created, to give and receive grace in creation, --to be one with all the animals and plants and minerals. One in grace. Created to spread grace. Not to grasp, clutch, and cling--but to spread grace with joy. If we know grace, we know joy.

This will of God—grace!—sets us free! We can relax into it if we can let go of all the things that are so important, all of our senses of right and wrong, all of our demands of justice. The Spirit in our lives teaches us all of these lessons, if we will let go of our demands and expectations, insisting on our way. Elizabeth and Mary are pregnant with something new. Are we open to something new today? Christ is coming. Freedom is coming. Either we give ourselves over to it, or we will never learn of its joy. Freedom-grace requires discipline as we push ourselves to let go of our fear of not enough. As Christ comes, he brings plenty. Our foundation is love and belonging.

If grace seems distant, ask, and you shall receive. Seek, and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. To receive, find, and have the door be opened, we must listen, listen, and listen some more. We must trust, trust, and trust some more. Christ is coming. So, let us pray by listening. Let us trust by giving away the very things we to which we desperately cling. God's will is breaking forth all around us.

May we have courage to wait, to listen, and see what happens next. Thanks be to God. Amen.