



COMMUNITY  
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*Third Sunday of Advent*  
*December 12, 2004*

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*Matthew 6:6-15*

Intro: Our second lesson comes from the first chapter of Luke. It is the story of surprise as Mary and Elizabeth meet, each of them carrying a child in their womb and the children respond to each other. Mary and Elizabeth have heard a word from God and are willing to believe something amazing is about to happen. Let us listen for God's word to us.

It seems that this year I have heard more people than usual saying things like, "I'm not going to bother putting up ornaments this year. Or "it's too much trouble to get a tree." Maybe its just me, but I've sensed that one the whole people aren't expecting much from the holidays this year. Rather than a sense of joyful anticipation, there is more of a mood of muddle through. Some say it's the downturn in the market, or the uncertainty of the world situation, or the old favorite "I'm too busy to have a holiday!" If that's so, we must wonder "WHY".

Why is it that we don't expect much from this season, or year round for that matter? I'd like to repeat a phrase from scripture this morning "and blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the lord" Elizabeth in her old age, and Mary in her youth were each told they would have a special child. And against all the crazy odds, in spite of all the outrageous implications of what these babies would bring. They believed and they looked forward to what would come.

They believed God was going to do something in their lives right then, and they would be forever different. We are just days from Christmas, as we consider our experience of Advent, have we approached Christmas with an expectation that God can and just might break into our lives with something new to say? As we pray and prepare do we think God hears and cares?

In our first reading we heard the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray like that, like the Christmas story, they are familiar words. What sense of expectation do we have as we pray it? As a way of illustrating what could happen at Christmas time with God speaking directly to us...Listen as I offer the words Jesus taught...

Our Father who art in Heaven....

Yes?

Don't interrupt me. I'm praying....

But you called Me.

Called you? I didn't call you. I'm praying. "Our Father who art in Heaven."

There, you did it again.

Did what?

Called Me. You said, "Our Father who art in Heaven. . ." Here I am. What's on your mind?

But I didn't mean anything by it. I was, you know, just saying my prayers for the day. I always say the Lord's Prayer. It makes me feel good, kind of like getting my duty done.

All right. Go on.

Hallowed be Thy name.

Hold it. What do you mean by that?

By what?

By "Hallowed be Thy name."

It means...it means...good grief, I used to know what it means. Is this a quiz? It's just part of the prayer. Of all people, You shouldn't need me to translate. By the way, what does it mean?

Let me help you out. It means "honored," "Holy," "Wonderful."

Hey, that sounds right. "Hallowed" isn't a word we use much anymore. "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven."

Do you really mean that?

Sure, - why not?

What are you going to do about it?

What am I Doing? Nothing, I guess. I just think it would be neat if you got control of everything down here like you have up there.

Have I got control of you?

Well, I go to church. In fact, I work for the church!.

That isn't what I asked you. I'm asking if you are using your time and energy in the best ways possible. I mean take a look at that office of yours? And how many times can you change a sermon title? You've really got a problem there, you know. And then there's the way you spend your money.... And what about the things you think are funny?

Stop picking on me! I'm just as good as some of the rest of these people at church.

Excuse me...I thought you were praying for My will to be done. If that is to happen, it will have to start with the ones who are praying for it. Like you, for example.

Oh, all right! I guess I do have some hang-ups. Now that you mention it, I could probably name some others.

So could I.

I haven't thought about it until now, but I really would like to let go of some of those things. I'd like to, you know, be really free.

Good, now we're getting somewhere. We'll work together...you and I can have some victories that can truly be won. I'm proud of you.

Look, Lord, I need to finish up here. This is taking a lot longer than it usually does...  
"Give us this day our daily bread."

You need to cut down on the bread too...You're getting a little pudgy you know.

I'm wearing a big black robe! What is this, "Criticize Dan Day?" Here I am doing my religious duty, and all of a sudden You break in and remind me of all my "issues". You are staring to sound like Dr. Phil.

Praying is a dangerous thing. You could wind up changed, you know. That's what I'm trying to get across to you. You called me, and here I am. It's too late to stop now. Keep on praying. I'm interested in the next part of your prayer...Well, go on.

I'm scared to.

Scared? Of what?

I know what you'll say.

Try Me and see.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

What about Craig?

See I knew it! I knew you would bring him up! You know the story, it goes way back, he's told lies about me, cheated me out of money. He never paid back that debt he owes me. Ever since seventh grade - I've sworn to get even.

But your prayer...What about your prayer?

I didn't mean it.

Well, at least you're honest. How is that working for you? It's not much fun carrying the load of bitterness around inside is it?

No, but I'll feel better as soon as I get even. Boy, have I made some plans for O'l Craig! He'll wish he never did some of those things.

You won't feel any better. You'll feel worse. Revenge isn't sweet. Think of how unhappy you are already. But I can change all that.

You can? How?

Forgive Craig. Then I'll forgive you. Then the hate and sin will be Craig's problem and not yours. You may lose the money, but you will settle your heart! .

But Lord, I can't forgive Craig.

Then I can't forgive you.

Oh.. arrgh. you're right! Of course you are, You always are. And more than I want revenge on Craig, I want to be right with You. All right! I forgive him. Help him to find the right road in life, Lord. He's bound to be miserable, now that I think about it. Some way, some how, show him the right way.

There now! How do you feel?

Hmmm...not bad. Not bad at all, In fact I feel a lot better.

You're not through with your prayer...Go on.

Oh, all right...And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Good...good. I'll do that. Just don't put yourself in a place where you can be tempted.

What do you mean by that?

Don't race down the wrong road, get lost and then expect me to fix it all on the spot. You have an essential role in how things go in your life. Don't use me for an escape hatch.

I don't understand.

Sure you do. You've done it lots of times. You get caught in a bad situation, you get into trouble and then you come running to me. "Lord, help me out of this mess, and I promise you I'll never do it again." You remember some of those bargains you tried to make with me?

Yes, and I'm ashamed, Lord. I really am.

Which bargains are you remembering? I remember this summer when you were up in the sailplane and the runway looked SO far away and you thought the wind was going to quit and you said...

I know what I said.

Or the time you thought you were caught in a rip-tide and you just knew there were great white sharks waiting to greet you.

I remember that too.

I was always there for you wasn't I?

I'm sorry Lord, I really am. Up until now I thought if I just prayed the Lord's prayer everyday, then I could do what I liked. I didn't expect anything to happen like it did.

Go ahead. Finish your prayer.

Oh yes...For Thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory forever and forever.

Amen.

Do you know what would bring me glory? What would make me really happy?

No, but I'd like to know. I want to please You. I can see plenty of troubles in my life, and I can see how great it would be to "see you more clearly and follow you more nearly".

Please don't start singing. You just answered the question.

I did?

Yes, the one thing that would bring me glory is to have people like you truly love me. And I can see that happening between us. Now that some of these old sins are exposed and out of the way, well, there's no telling what we can do together.

Lord, let's see what we can make of me, OK?

Yes, let's see...

Christmas is around to corner. God's already to be born in our lives once more. Blessed is he, Blessed is she who believes there will be a fulfillment of what was spoken by the Lord. Are we listening are we expectant? Amen.