

Order of Worship for December 4th, 2011, Second Advent & Communion

Prelude

Pre-service Song

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship: Second Sunday in Advent: Jesus sent from the Father as our High Priest: Hebrews 7:21
(begin with “...this one was made a priest...”) – 7:28 and prayer

Special Music: “The Little Singers” directed by Lorinda Spencer

“Hosanna” directed by Darlene Bell

“Happy Birthday, Jesus”

“Bethlehem Lullaby”

Songs of Worship:

“O Come, All Ye Faithful”

Song # 249

“O Thou Joyful, O Thou Wonderful” (this is rarely sung!)

Song # 282

“That Beautiful Name”

Song # 266

Offering

The Lord’s Supper

Preparing the heart with song:

“Christ Alone”

Overhead

Invitation and Prayer of Dedication

Distribution and Taking of the Elements

Response in song:

“How Great Our Joy!”

Song # 269

Message:

“Good Things and Real Things: the Second Sign”

(John 4:43-54)

by Pastor Bronson

Closing Song:

“Joy to the World!”

Song # 270

Parting Word of Grace

[I tried to find songs featuring the priesthood of Christ, but there simply aren’t any! So I picked songs that avoided celebrating Him as Lord and King and instead dealt with sin and salvation as this is a communion service. “Joy to the World” is thematic for this season.]

Sunday Evening in the Word

Hebrews 13:17 to the end!

5:30 pm to 7:00 pm

The Henneker Music Building

“The Prayer Closet”

December

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

Lois McMartin and EFCA ReachGlobal Ministries: the Spirit will gift Lois with strength for travel and wisdom for counsel as she travels overseas to missionary families; the Lord will raise up both short term and career missionaries for worldwide missions, the financial downturn and economic recession will not compromise the worldwide effectiveness of the Free Church missions

President Obama: the Lord will preserve him and his family in good health; the Spirit will open their hearts to the full meaning of the incarnation of Christ; they will prize the Christian heritage of our nation

The Nominating Committee and the Congregation: the Spirit will stir the hearts of those who are called to serve on the ministry Boards of the church; the Lord will direct the Committee to nominate those He has prepared to be His servants

Military or Public Service Personnel of the week: Jeremiah Gonzales, Dept. of Corrections & Rehabilitation (husband of Jennifer): for continued safety and that he remain alert to his surroundings at all times.

Young Adult of the Week: Caleb Bronson, University of Michigan (son of John & Nini: for God’s clear leading regarding his summer plans

We continue in our study of John and I encourage you to turn in your gospels to John 4:43-54. John calls this the second sign. I have entitled it, “Good Things and Real Things?”

It is Christmas; have you noticed? You don’t have to come here; all you have to do is walk around town. You could say “Tis the Season for Advertisement!” It is all over the place. Businesses go to great lengths to advertise their products. Most of us know that. Increasingly smart businesses seek to target their advertising to specific markets, the people they hope to attract. One of the most recent endeavors along this line is the use of the social media on the internet. I hope you are aware of this. There are computer programs that record and store every message that you put on the social media. Then there are clever people who have devised programs which are able to sort and analyze all of this data in order to spot certain trends and certain kinds of people with commercially significant interests. By doing so commercial enterprise can tailor both their products and their advertising to target the interests and fit the trends. So if you ever open a computer and you say to yourself, “That’s amazing! I can’t believe that they are advertising [what] I am so interested in. I’ve been hoping to find one of these!” please know you just got caught! One of the companies that does this analysis charges customers, these are businesses, thirty thousand dollars a month for their services. So there are plenty of fish to be caught.

We can learn much about an enterprise by the way it advertises and where it directs its advertisements. I have been intrigued and amused, mildly amused, to see how advertisements these days feature – have you noticed this, advertisements increasingly feature people with gray hair and just a hint of wrinkles. I thought about this: it is not because they have run out of those offensively young, thin and beautiful people that used to be in all the ads. No, no: what they are doing is following the money. Baby Boomers: as we get old and take our money with us, they are following in hot pursuit. As soon as I get some money they are going to want to pursue me. I know that’s going to happen. I’m hoping, right!

You might be wondering by now whether this has anything to do with the Gospel. Well let’s hope so; I’m trying to figure that out myself. Go in John 4 to verse 54. That is the last of the verses [in this section], and I want to begin at the end. This is what John writes, “*This was now the second sign that Jesus did when He came from Judea to Galilee.*” A “sign” points to something other than itself. John referred to these miracles made by Jesus as signs because he knows that among other things Jesus performed the miracles as a means for capturing people’s attention so that they would listen to what He had to say. In other words the signs were advertisements for the kingdom of heaven. (Questions 1 and 2 both relate at this point.)

Advertising is difficult business. Some of you are probably involved in advertising and you know it is an extremely difficult thing to do well. Most of us know, I hope, that there is a distinction between what appears to be good and what is real. Advertisement always tells you what is good, but they do not necessarily tell you what is real. Normally you find out what is real when you get home! There are difficulties in advertising. Advertisements inevitably give you a partial truth. There is no way that an advertisement can tell you all that is true about a product. It simply can’t be done. The advertisement is designed to introduce a product, telling the customer enough to clinch the deal, to get you to make the purchase. That is the intent of the advertisement. There is a reason, of course for the truth in advertising laws. Further, advertisements in the nature of the case are always aimed at an audience that is larger than those who will respond correctly. Advertising casts a net and hopes to catch as many fish as possible, knowing full well many fish will escape: of course! Consequently, we also recognize that people can respond to an advertisement wrongly. They can miss the basic message. They can go for the product really for the wrong reason. So you see there is always a certain amount of frustration attending any advertising campaign because the advertiser knows there will be wasted resources and unwanted customers as a result. Advertising always involves a calculated risk.

I mention all of this because I think when you examine the Gospels you recognize that Jesus experienced some of this kind of frustration. That, I believe is what we read in John 4:48, Jesus said, “Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.” As I hope to demonstrate, that was in the nature of a complaint on Jesus’ part. Why would Jesus complain? Well, [He would complain] for all the reasons that advertisers complain about advertising. Advertising has a tendency to draw people for the wrong reasons. This is not particularly clear in this section of John’s gospel, not here in chapter 4. But if you were to go over to chapter 6 and look at verses 14-15, there in chapter 6 we have an account of Jesus feeding the 5000. The 5000 was just the men; it did not include the women and children, so there were more than 5000 people there. By managing to feed this entire crowd with just five barely loaves and two fish, He amazed the disciples, but He delighted the crowd. In fact, we are told that the crowd was so delighted with Jesus, they decided they were going to make Him their king. That is what you read about in verse 14-15 in chapter 6. “*When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, ‘This is indeed the prophet that is to come into the world.’ Perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.*” Jesus knew full well that He was destined to become king. But Jesus also knew that popular acclaim based on a free lunch was not the pathway to power: that is a truth our own politicians too easily forget. Remember that Jesus was well acquainted with us. If you will recall, in chapter 2:24-25 Jesus gave us His opinion of us. He said, “*Jesus on His part did not entrust himself to them [meaning us], because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.*”

What I would like you to do at this point is go to another passage that shows the tension between what Jesus does and those that are attracted to Him. That would be Luke 4:14-30. This is the account of when Jesus comes back to his hometown of Nazareth. It speaks of the response of the people in that town to His arrival and what He had to say to them in the synagogue.

“And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind. To set a liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’ And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, ‘Is not this Joseph’s son?’ And he said to them, ‘Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, “Physician, heal yourself.”’ What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’ And he said, ‘Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.’ When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away.”

Wrong response! Just a little reflection on this event: Jesus began His comments by citing Isaiah, perhaps the greatest prophet of the word other than Moses. He said very clearly, citing Isaiah, I have come to proclaim to proclaim. He then moved on to Elijah and Elisha. They were also prophets. But rather than being primarily prophets of the word, they were prophets of action, engaged in a power contest with the idols. As between these two kinds of prophets, Jesus offered Himself to Nazareth as a prophet of the word, not a prophet of

miracles. But what they wanted, however, was not a preacher; they wanted a healer. They responded in their disappointment with murderous fury. Clearly the issues here are of the greatest importance of our souls.

Let us go back to John 4. In thinking about the second sign, or as I am characterizing it today, the second advertisement of the gospel that Jesus performed, we should always ask ourselves these two questions: what can we learn about Jesus as the Messiah or the Christ (that is John’s intention, that we would believe in [Jesus] as the Christ), and we should always ask, what can we learn about God the Father, for that is Jesus’ intention, he wants to reveal the Father as the Father of grace and truth. So let us begin at verse 43.

After the two days he departed for Galilee. (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast. So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. So Jesus said to him, ‘Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.’ The official said to him, ‘Sir, come down before my child dies.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go, your son will live.’ The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, ‘Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.’ The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, ‘Your son will live.’ And he himself believed, and all his household. This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.”

A brief word probably needs to be given here regarding verses 43-45. If you find them odd so do commentators; so don’t feel badly. All four Gospels record the comment that a prophet is not honored in his own country or own hometown. However, all the other gospels, as we read in Luke, make that comment in direct association of Jesus having gone into the city of Nazareth and failed to respond “appropriately” to their desires. John doesn’t do that, so you might wonder. Jesus was born, as we know in Bethlehem, the City of David. But he was raised in Nazareth, a city in Galilee, so Nazareth was His hometown. Actually, it was not very far away from Cana, which is probably why he had friends in Cana. What John says is that when Jesus came to Galilee he was welcomed by the Galileans. “So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem. . .” The Galileans had also gone to Jerusalem and seen his confrontation with the temple priest and this obviously had pleased them. I suspect the comment regarding no honor in your home town is explaining why Jesus didn’t go back to Nazareth at this time, because why would he? In fact, why mention the sad episode at Nazareth at all? There is a very good reason. The apostle Paul tells us the Son of God entered into and experienced the whole of our condition. But as we noted a little bit already today [during the Lord’s Supper], the book of Hebrews clarifies that Jesus was tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Perhaps in these somewhat obscure verses we are given a glimpse of one of those trials in Jesus’ life. I want you to think about this for a moment. What do you think it meant for Jesus to go back to His home town and be rejected with such fury that they attempted to kill him? There are some things it is wise for us to put into our understanding because we can treat Jesus as un-human rather than fully human. Remember that Jesus had lived there for almost 30 years. During that time, being the oldest son, he had grown up and worked alongside His father in the carpentry business. How many here are involved in a small business in a small town? There are some things we know about Jesus and we can properly apply them to His experience there. Jesus took over the business after His father died. What kind of businessman do you think He was? He was necessarily the very best. He would treat His customers with absolute honesty. He would be consistently patient and compassionate. Indeed within the context of that community, Jesus would have been a good friend to all, because that is His nature. And then He is spurned.

Rejection is hard. We oftentimes avoid obedience out of fear of rejection. Jesus knows about rejection. Indeed, I think that Nazareth was Jesus’ first lesson in the hardness of fallen humanity. When you read the Gospels you

realize that not a single one of His disciples came from Nazareth. I think here by a bit of reflection on these few verses in contrast and association with what we know from the other gospels, we can appreciate in a whole new way what we know is true: God loves us not because we are particularly lovable, but because He chooses to love us. If you are like me, now and then you look in the mirror and you wish you didn't see who you saw. But remember that God does not love you because you are so magnificent; He loves you because He is magnificent. But there is an application. We are to love others not because they are lovable, but because we choose to love them with the love of God.

Jesus returns to Cana, instead of going right back to Nazareth, where he would likely have stopped at his friend's again, where can be sure He would have been welcomed. Then He goes on to Capernaum, a town beside the sea. There he is met by an official. If you have any explanatory notes in your Bible it may tell you that based on the term used this official was not of the Roman government, but of Herod's, Herod Antipas, the grandson of the Herod who tried to have Jesus murdered as a baby boy. This is the Herod whom Jesus will later on call, derisively, “That Fox”. What he meant was a sneaky, greedy, grasping creature. This man would not be loved by the people; at best he would be tolerated. Now it is interesting to think for just a moment: with whom have we seen Jesus in close association: with Nicodemus, with the Samaritan woman, and now with this official. Once again as I think we mentioned last week all that it takes to qualify for God's grace is to be a sinner. You can be a wealthy, highly intelligent, extremely well-educated sinner, or you can be a down in dumps and in the dregs sinner, but that is all it takes, because God doesn't love us because we are magnificent; He loves us because He is magnificent and delights to love His creatures.

We are told nothing of the official other than that he had a son that was sick unto death and that he appealed to Jesus for healing. Jesus' response is probably a little bit troubling, unless we smooth it over. When Jesus dealt with the Samaritan woman He was so gracious to her. Here Jesus seems almost harsh, depending on how you read that passage. Knowing that Jesus has moved His family and headquartered His ministry in Capernaum could mislead as to the way Jesus felt about or what He thought about the people of Capernaum. He might have thought, what a great town [this is]; what great schools (for other people's children, for He didn't have any of His own); good mall here, great coffee shops: this would be a wonderful place to live! If you're entertaining those false ideas, listen to Jesus own words regarding Capernaum, the town from which the official comes. We start out with a couple of other towns: this is from Luke 10:13-15. *“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades.”* That's Jesus opinion of Capernaum.

Knowing this should help us to understand Jesus' word to the official. Up to this point even though Jesus has performed miracles and preached the coming of the kingdom and called for people to repent, this man has been unmoved. It is not until this encounter, in spite of all the evidence around him that we are told the man finally believes. His son is sick. Jesus can heal people. So he goes to Jesus. The potential consequences of our mistaken impression of those towns are nothing compared to the potential consequences of misperceiving Jesus. If we can be mistaken about how Jesus thought regarding those towns, what other mistakes are we likely to make?

It makes all the difference, doesn't it, as to how we act out this little scene in our heads as to how it goes down in our lives. Understandably we prefer to think of Jesus speaking measured words filled with tenderness, something like this: “Oh, unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe,” with the clear indication that, whappo zappo, here comes a sign and a wonder so you will believe. It would not be the first time that Jesus dealt with a man who wanted to believe and struggled. You might recall that when [Jesus] came down off the Mount of Transfiguration he encountered His disciples who were trying to help a man whose son was possessed by a demon. Jesus came up to him and the man said, “They have failed; is it possible?” Jesus said all things are possible with me. Jesus asked, “Do

you believe?” The man said, “I believe, help my unbelief!” I suspect that we can identify [with this]. But perhaps Jesus’ words here are dismissive: “Go your way, your son will be healed.” Jesus does many wonderful things for people who never believe. Perhaps that is because they only see him as a healer for their bodies and do not comprehend that His intention was to heal their souls. It is the intention of this gospel, we know, to bear a clear witness so that the reader will believe in Jesus as the Messiah sent by God the Father as the Savior of the world. It is the intention of Jesus to reveal His heavenly Father as the God of grace and truth. However, neither John nor Jesus attempts to hide what we might consider to be the inconvenient truths that might contradict our impressions. Jesus as Savior is not to be thought of as incapable of any but soft and tender emotions regarding those of us who are stubbornly sinful. Jesus the Son shares with God the Father an implacable hatred of sin and His grief over sin’s cruel consequences in our lives will sometimes speak its mind against stubborn hearts that will not receive the convicting truth of His forgiving and healing grace. It is exceedingly unwise for us to mistake Jesus.

It is interesting when you read this interview between Jesus and the man, there in verse 50, there is no word of thanks, no word of hope. “Go.” Until, of course, you read that the man believed. The interview between Jesus and the man appears to be over in the midst of verse 50, but the event is not over. First we are told by John that the man believed what Jesus said. The man believed with no miracle at all. So perhaps there is another way of hearing Jesus speak to the official who sought healing for his son. Perhaps Jesus simply spoke to the man with the simplicity of certainty with the knowledge of His own authority and power. “I am able to heal your son, and he is healed!” The man said in his heart: “Got it!” The man is met by his servants as he is returning to his home. He asks and they tell him his son is recovering. The man says, “When did his condition improve?” They said, “At the seventh hour.” And he said, “That’s the moment I believed.” So the last comment is that this is the second sign. But I think there is a certain ambiguity here that you and I need to think about. What is the sign? Is the sign the healing of the boy, or is it the believing by the man? Now let me give you an application: you and I are signs of God’s grace. We are here in this world to be the presence of God’s light and truth. Do you believe?

Please pray with me: our heavenly Father we thank you for the Word you have given to us, the Word inscribed that it might not be forgotten. We thank you our Father for the Spirit that you have given to us who writes this word upon our hearts and grants to us understanding. We thank you our Father for the Lord Jesus Christ whom you have given to us, who shed His blood for us that we might live. Bless us, keep us, use us, be glorified in and through us. We ask this of Father in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. What are some of your favorite advertisements? What makes for a good advertisement?
2. Does it seem right to you to say that Jesus’ miracles advertised for the Gospel?
3. The message claimed that advertisements offer partial truths and necessarily appeal to more people than will rightly or appropriately respond to what is offered. Do you agree?
4. Would you say that people are drawn to the gospel for deficient or wrong reasons, or based on wrong or insufficient understanding? Does the record of Jesus’ miracles foster this? (see again Luke 4:14-30 and John 6:14-15)
5. Have you ever been rejected as Jesus was, as a result of your remaining faithful to God’s call on and purpose for your life? Why is rejection so difficult to handle?
6. Jesus had no love for Herod Antipas, calling him a fox. Perhaps he felt the same toward other officials. Do you have difficulties dealing with government officials? What are the challenges which government officials face if they are Christians today? How can we help them?
7. In light of what we read in Luke 10:13-15, do you think Jesus had “an attitude” towards those towns? Is Jesus speaking prophetically of these towns?
8. How would you react if you knew of someone who in spite of refusing and rejecting the gospel over a space of time, still went off to someone who healed people in the name of Jesus?
9. How do you “hear” Jesus speaking to the official regarding the healing of his son? Do you think Jesus ever got tired of or fed up with the people He dealt with?
10. Do you know of anyone who came to faith as the result of a miracle in their life?