

Sermon :: 07-Dec-2025
Advent 2, Year A

“ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace ...,
so that you may abound in hope ”

Fezziwig: It was a term of endearment in my family when we were growing up ... a delightful pet name my father sometimes called my sister. Imagine my surprise, then, when I learned that Dad hadn't *invented* it ... but, instead, *borrowed* it from Charles Dickens' A CHRISTMAS CAROL. Do *you* remember Mr Fezziwig?

Just in case you need a little refresher: The ghost of Jacob Marley ... bound in the “chains [he] forged in [his] life” ... haunts Scrooge—there's really no other word for it!—and tells him that he'll receive three visitations ... which will offer Scrooge the “**hope** of escaping” Marley's accursed “fate.”

And soon enough, the first Spirit—that of Christmas *Past*—arrives at Scrooge's bedside. In quick succession, she shows Scrooge several scenes from his childhood and early adult years: ¶his cheerfully playing with friends as a small boy ... before being all but orphaned at boarding school, by a father who bitterly resents him for his mother's death, in childbirth; ¶his relatively happy years as an apprentice at the aforementioned Mr Fezziwig's wool-trading establishment, including a certain Christmas Eve soiree of great joy and memorable mirth; ¶his *courting* of Belle, whom Scrooge first meets at Fezziwig's ... *and*, eventually, his *losing* her: She breaks off their wedding engagement after she realizes that Scrooge prizes his budding business career—and even *more*, the great *wealth* it generates—*far* more than *her*. After a final glimpse of the life Belle then came to have—a loving husband and a large family ... *Scrooge* demands to be returned home. The Spirit quickly, and unceremoniously, obliges.

This first visitation ... this first-phase inventory of a life *lived* and an identity *forged* ... doesn't go very well. While Scrooge relishes revisiting some of the *happier* moments of his early life ... he *bristles* at the opportunity to acknowledge some of the *external* forces and circumstances of his young life that he *couldn't* control ... *and* he *rejects* the invitation to reassess some of his *own* values and decisions that he *could*. Scrooge resists pondering the *past* ... in the **hope** of a different—a *renewed*, a *reclaimed*—**future**.¹

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On the *one* hand, *unlike* Scrooge, there is nothing *we* need to change concerning our *ultimate* future—our eternal ‘fate’: We are free from Jacob Marley's specter hovering *our* earthly mortality ... for in Jesus' coming, dying and rising again, He has redeemed us from our sins and granted us *forever-life* in *Him*, full stop. On the *other* hand, *very* much **like** Scrooge ... in Advent, we're given an opportunity ... extended an invitation ... to *see* ... to *appreciate* ... to *grasp* ... to *live into* ... the new thing that Christ has *done*, and is *doing*, for us ... so we may embrace and embody, more fully, the **hope** He offers us (and all!), in **this** life.

If we're to go deeper than the superficial sentimentality of a holiday-card cherubic Jesus lying in a tidy little Manger ... if we're to truly sing *with* the angels in their exultation; truly *feel* the shepherds'

¹ Indeed in the final scene of this “stave” (as Dickens calls the chapters in this CAROL), Scrooge literally tries to snuff into darkness the light the Spirit of Christmas Past has spilled across his early years.

awestruck joy ... not only *accept*, but also delight—*revel*—in the New *Future*² that Christ both *brings* and *is*, at *Christmas* ... then during *Advent*, we, like Scrooge, may need to *ponder* ... *reflect* upon ... *wrestle* with ... some of the pricklier elements of our own ***past***. Just as the Spirit offers Scrooge the opportunity to examine his *own* history ... his *own* decisions ... in the **hope** of creating a new future (unlike Marley's) for *himself* ... so, too, is *Advent*, for *us*, an opportunity to do some similar self-examining ... in the **hope** of identifying what prevents us from opening *ourselves*, more and more *fully*, to the New ... evolving ... and maybe even a little-surprising ... **Future Christ** gives birth to, in *us*, at *Christmas*.

And our lessons for today suggest a few questions we might profitably explore during our *Advent* self-examination:

- First, how deeply—how *spiritually*—are we in touch with God's *abiding goodness* for us? The God Who, Isaiah tells us, will bring a green shoot from a near-dead stump ... a fruit-laden branch from a mere root ... *wants* what is *good* ... what is *affirming* ... what is *fulfilling* and *life-giving* ... for us. And Jesus will keep planting new seeds ... pruning unpromising branches ... ripening budding fruit, in us. He is our ***constant support*** and ***perpetual blessing***.
 > Scrooge has come to believe that the *accumulation of money* is ultimate success in this life. The Spirit begins showing him, instead, that it is *faith*: belief in something beyond ourselves ... in something beyond this world's blinkered values.
 > An **invitation of Advent**, therefore, is to ask ourselves whether our faith makes *room* for ... truly and fully *embraces* ... the beneficence ... the boundlessness ... the all-givingness ... of God's so-deep love for us that God gave us—each *one* of us, ***personally***—God's own Son.
- Second, how alert—how *discerningly* alert—are we to God's *ongoing revelation* of Godself in and for our lives? St Paul quotes *Moses*, with Israel standing at the threshold of the Promised Land ... *Isaiah*, with Israel's very existence teetering, some five or six centuries later ... and the *Psalms*, to cover all the time in between³ ... to teach the Christians at Rome God's continuing exposition—*sharing*—of God's will for us. God *never* ceases speaking to us, through the Holy Spirit.
 But just as Scripture has come down to us as the product of 'harvesting' and heeding the *true* word of God ... and discarding the rest, which distracts **from** or dims it ... so we, too, need to look back across our lives, to see when *God* was nudging or poking us ... and when someone (or something) *else* distracted or dimmed our focus on God's will for us.
 > *Part* of the 'tableau' the Spirit of Christmas Past presents Scrooge is times of love organically shared and peace uncomplicatedly enjoyed; and *part* is times when other people ... or circumstances ... or even Scrooge *himself* ... rejected love or thwarted peace or made them both impossible. The Spirit's lesson is that what isn't *God-given* ... is ephemeral ... mutable ... changeable: that *neither* our choices *nor* our circumstances need harden into *destiny*.
 > An **invitation of Advent**, therefore, is to ask ourselves—*discern*—when, in our *own* lives, God has *truly spoken* to us ... a path to follow, a commitment to make, a gift to share ... and let ***these*** words echo through our lives; and when others ... or

² *I.e.*, the Good News.

³ I refer here only to the chronological order to which these texts would have been assigned by Jews of Paul's day (and earlier), and not of the order in which, or the occasions on which, we *now* believe them to have been created.

circumstances beyond our control ... or even our *own* fallible natures ... have ‘grabbed the mic’ and become the controlling narrative—toxic ‘tapes’ of our own inadequacy, unworthiness or even unlovability ... so we can *dismiss these* words as falsehoods that *distract* from, or *dim*, God’s truth, for us.

- And finally, how open—*vulnerably* open—are we to God’s holy prophets in our midst? The last and greatest prophet in Scripture is St John the Baptist, whom St Matthew tells of, today. God sent John to Israel to point the way ... open the eyes; unstop the ears; turn the hearts ... of God’s People to the wonderful new thing God was about to do, in Jesus. God had *new* news—new *Good* News—to share ... and Israel needed someone to help them *receive* it.
> This is, of course, the role of the spirit—of all *three* spirits—who visit Scrooge: prophets ... emanating from the love and care of God ... who call Scrooge to a *good*lier, *god*lier life: an embrace of the abundance of God’s *grace*, for us to *share* ... *and* the compassion of Gods’ *vision*, for us to *see* this world *through*.
> An **invitation of Advent**, therefore, is to ask ourselves who may be the people in our lives ... near and far; close and casual; work and home; sacred and secular ... who’re whispering God’s call to us: ¶ Might the suggestion we’ve heard for the sixth or seventh time, now ... be the message of an *angel*, to *guide* us? ¶ Might others’ rejection of an idea we treasure ... be the message of a *prophet*, to *point* us to something still *more* promising? ¶ Might the out-of-the-blue—and perhaps rather *inconvenient*—opportunity that’s suddenly presented itself ... be the *Holy Spirit*, *asking* us to make a *leap of faith*? For when we open ourselves to the messengers of God in our lives, however stealthy ... we open ourselves to the messages of *Christ*, as well.

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We reach a certain *age* ... a certain *station* ... a certain *quantum* of life-experience or, perhaps, a certain *quality* of relationship with Jesus ... and we *come* to, or perhaps *fall into* ... the conclusion ... the rationalization ... the *hopelessness*—or, at least, the *un-hopeful-ness* ... that whatever *is*, will *be* ... however I *am*, is *destiny*. *Scrooge* did, to be sure.

But as the spirit shows him ... our past is only how we *got* here—not necessarily where we’re *going*. I invite you, then ... this Advent ... to actively *examine* your past, rather than resigning yourselves *to* it ... to more-fully open yourself to the New Future that Christ brings us at Christmas: God’s abiding goodness, **hoping** us ... ongoing revelation, *inspiring* us ... holy prophets, whispering in our midst. For this, *indeed*, is the invitation of *Advent*.

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