

SERMON: "Together at Advent: Be Present."

Rev. Geoff Ross Sun., Dec. 2, 2018 St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton

[Advent/Christmas season has begun! Pre-Advent Event/42nd Cookie Party/which means there's about 22 more days to get started on the shopping!]

We all know the stereotype. It's Christmas Eve and the mall is packed – with men/fathers/husbands/boyfriends/sons – each one frantic/panicked/harried looking for something/anything to buy for that next person on their list (wife/mother/girlfriend/kids): I know it well because I've been one of them. It's like a shame-club: Christmas Shopping Guy! "Hello, my name's Geoff, and I've shopped on Christmas Eve!" Sure, there's always an excuse – not enough time/too much to do/always something on the go/something more important – why I end up at that purgatory known as the Mall on Christmas Eve to buy whatever's handy – with next to no thought given to the gift or the person who will receive it.

[What's the worst present you've ever bought? Come on, be honest – your confession's safe in the Christmas Shopping Guy club/what's said here/stays here! 14/Bought sister a bottle of 7up – she didn't even like pop/neither did I!]

I wasn't always like that – time was I looked forward to Christmas (Work has kind of made it less enjoyable); I would take time thinking about what each person in my family liked/enjoyed/wanted – never 'needed' – and would then go all over Toronto to out-of-the-way, one-off places, and buy something that "spoke to me" about them. Some years I every gift I gave would be follow a theme – wood/glass/antique: I loved the hunt; presents were something special.

Christmas changed when our kids came along: hard to be 'creative' on a budget! Because of my work Regan dealt with most of it. But I missed it so I'd blow through the budget and buy everyone a 'small extra.' In what little time I had I'd buy something, *[Rapture happened!]* then after all the Christmas Eve services were over, and everyone had gone to bed, I'd wrap these gifts and put them under the tree. On Christmas morning, their joy affirmed why I bought those presents. But even then – more so now – I realized something: time is flying by *[faster now!]* and even though it's nice to get/give presents, none of them can make up for those moments when we were together. Now, I don't want to just buy presents: I want to be present – with them/them with me.

[God doesn't give us stuff/things/7up: doesn't give what we want - need: knows/loves us – 1st Christmas didn't give just another gift/gave us Himself – Emmanuel/God with us!]

The John reading fulfills the prophecy of the "voice of the wilderness" (Isaiah 40) and that of the messenger in Malachi 3 who will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord as Messiah. This is at the heart of the promise in the Old Testament and its fulfillment in Jesus' birth – His presence. In this new age/era/covenant/Testament, God doesn't keep his distance/mourning over His rebellious children errant choices: He acts toward us by choosing to be present among us as the Savior.

Instead of simply crying out in the wilderness, as John does in both Matthew/Luke, in the first chapter of John the "the Baptist" points his own disciples/the world to Jesus

referring to Him as “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*” A Title/reference meant to get the attention of the people of this day. And, unlike the birth narratives with their angelic proclamations, John’s Gospel starts before time/space and zooms past Jesus’ birth to His first public act – His baptism. After all, this was John the Baptizer’s Job – instead of pointing shepherds toward the manger he’s pointing to the coming of ‘Christ’/Messiah among His people – and the fulfilment of God’s promised presence.

[(John 1:35-39) John uses this term to welcome Jesus/two of John’s disciples follow Jesus – at a distance. Jesus turns and asks: “What are you looking for/do you want?” Jesus doesn’t give them stuff/things/to do lists He invites them to “come and see” inviting them on be-with Him: Jesus gives them Himself/is “being present” with them.]

“*Being Present*” isn’t simply about proximity, it’s about giving yourself to an other. The aim of this series – “*Together at Advent*” – is not to discourage/denigrate our Christmas traditions/customs – such as buying presents. Instead, the aim is to point out that what we both want/need is already with us/right there before us. To be present is to be present with God this Advent/Christmas season, as well as with family/friends/neighbours/strangers/refugees. This is what God in Jesus did for us, it’s what John did for his disciples, it’s what we’re to do for those we know/love: this year instead of buying presents – be both gift and present.

And what better way to be ‘Together at Advent’ than to share in the meal that celebrates that full/true measure of Jesus’ gift/presence. As we turn toward the Table – and Communion – may we be reminded that the first true gift of Christmas was Jesus’ presence as the Lamb of God/our Savior, as the name Emmanuel tells us – as God with us. Amen.