

## DECEMBER 8, 2019-SUMMARY SERMON-JOHN TSCHUDY

### SCRIPTURE LESSONS ISAIAH 11:1-10, ROMANS 15:4-13, MATTHEW 3:1-12

The Second Sunday of Advent is sometimes the Sunday of Faith and sometimes the Sunday of Love. Last year it was the Sunday of Peace. Yet the message of the scripture lessons today is one of inclusion, with the Jews especially being reminded by John the Baptist that if the only thing that mattered to God was being a Jew, God could produce all the Jews God wanted from the rocks in the river. They should not take their favored status for granted just because they observe the rituals of the religion. Rather they had to make a commitment that goes far beyond their superficial commitment. The one that was coming that they should truly be dedicated to following would make far harsher demands than superficial or symbolic actions. These same standards must be applied by us because we should be seeking and willing to endure that same Baptism by Fire. If God just wanted people to fill church pews, be born again, baptized in a certain way or belong to a certain church, aren't they as easy to produce from rocks in the river, as children of Abraham?

Advent should be the season for strengthening our Faith and increasing our love for all people. When Isaiah speaks of "Fearing God" what he is talking about is holding God in high esteem and respecting God, so that we seek to obey God's Word. Here is where having the Faith to accept and follow God's standards comes in. Notice Isaiah rules out God judging people because of superficial things that are easily seen. Notice God will judge the people of the world with equality not based on their wealth or who they are. Again just being a "Child of Abraham" isn't enough. Others are included and will be judged by standards of Faith and Love. Righteousness is based not just on obeying a set of laws or following a ritual. Rather it is based on living a life based on following God's way.

The familiar passage that ends this lesson is not a list of inaccessible things that sound good. Rather they symbolize the kind of world we are to strive for and truly seek to live in. It is a world where everyone is safe, weak or strong. Where we do not need to live in fear but rather live in Faith working for the good of each other. To achieve these goals requires a level of Faithfulness that goes far beyond a superficial commitment. Rather it demands a level of commitment to work to make things that seem impossible happen and the level of Faith in God to make that happen.

Paul's message is truly "The good news" to us because it is God's word that includes us non-Jews in the wonder and Glory of God. It is also a direct challenge to those that believe that God has only one standard of righteousness that all must meet. Here Paul is proclaiming, picking up on John's words perhaps, that God's love and salvation is for all people whether Jews or Gentiles. Christ's life, death and resurrection is for all the people of God. Yet we continue to try to divide the people of God into groups, with standards that can be judged by our eyes, ears and other physical means. But God's standards are not measured by human means. Rather it is God looking into our hearts that judge us and fill our hearts with faith in God and love for all of God's people. Thanks be to God!