

“COMFORT, COMFORT NOW MY PEOPLE”

Region 9, ELCA Video Sermon Series
12 December 2021

Luke 3: 7-18
3 Advent C / Our Lady of Guadalupe

Good morning! I am Bishop Bob Humphrey. I bring you greetings from 34,000 siblings in Christ in the VA Synod. Our denomination says, “We are church together!” None of us is church on our own. We really do need one another. Region 9 lives this truth out more and more every year – for which I am both grateful and hopeful for our future together.

Let us pray... *Lord, grant that your word is proclaimed in truth and received with joy!* Amen.

This is both a wonderful and hard time of year. Do you know what I mean?

You know... all the ways Hallmark cards, movies and many Christmas songs portray how it's “A Wonderful Life” for those who are fortunate and surrounded by people who love and support them. And, this *can* be a time for wonderful reunions, delighted faces and delicious food. I hope it is for you and those you love. I know I'm looking forward to the festivities and seeing family!

But..., this time of year can also be a time when relationships are strained, budgets busted and the deep, difficult experience of loss and grief can be almost suffocating. The combination of COVID racial injustice and hateful speech as done so much harm to so many, including our beloved church. That is part of why I am so grateful for strong communities and people of faith who make a point of remembering and reaching out to those who are suffering, oppressed and lonely.

Because, this paradoxical tension exists not only for us individually, but also as a church and society. We are both blessed by God and, we are also called by God to care for those who cannot, for a multitude of reasons, care for themselves or are victims of others and unjust systems!

So... On a Sunday like this, in a season like this, in a time like this – it is so helpful to come to worship and allow the people of God to surround us; the Word of God to both comfort and challenge us; and the Holy Meal of God to feed us... so we *can* go in peace... to serve others!

In many communities December 12th is also the commemoration or feast day for Our Lady of Guadalupe, in honor of the woman dressed in traditional Aztec clothing who appeared to an indigenous man in Mexico in 1531. This event has been embraced as Mary, the Mother of Jesus, speaking and appearing in ways that honor and lift up indigenous people everywhere.

As we hear at the Gospel from Luke 3, Dr. David Lose offers a very helpful commentary: “In these verses, John gives concrete ethical instruction to those gathered, and the content of that instruction is rather surprising. After announcing impending eschatological judgment with some vim and vigor, John's counsel seems fairly ordinary, even mundane. To the (presumably poor) crowds: “Share.” (vs 10). To the tax collectors, “Be fair.” (vs 13) To soldiers, “Don't bully.” (vs 14).

Pastor Lose continues, “This feels more like the stuff of Kindergarten than Apocalypse. Which may be Luke's point. Fidelity does not have to be heroic. There are opportunities to do God's will, to be God's people, all around us. These opportunities are shaped by our context: the roles in which we find ourselves and the needs of the neighbor with which we are confronted.” ---Dr. David Lose, (WorkingPreacher.org @2009)

Zephaniah said it well, “*Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgements against you... the Lord is in your midst (3:14b,15b)* From Isaiah we sang, *Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and will not be afraid... (12:2a)*

The amazing Grace and Good News Jesus brings into the world is simple. God loves us! God knows us – and still forgives and frees us... every day through our baptism and in worship. Our eternal salvation is secured, not through our effort or merit, but through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. You don't have to struggle or worry or work anymore! It's all done.

St. Paul proposed, *Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything...* (Philippians 4:5-6a) So, here is the classic Lutheran question: "What are we going to do – now that we don't *have to* worry or do anything... to earn God's favor?"

I don't know... how about we start by embracing the amazing Good News that God comes to us in ways that affirm us for being exactly who we are...beloved children of God!

Then, let's go in genuine peace... to serve the Lord every day in every way. A great place to start, especially these days, is with Pastor Lose's simple formula based on our Gospel reading today: "Share + Be Fair + Don't Bully!"

In this most holy season, amidst the flurry of feelings and the tensions that surround and fill us, May the Creator of all time and space fill you with a true sense of wonder, awe and holy peace... "Comfort, Comfort Now My People" In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen!

Bishop Robert F. Humphrey + Virginia Synod, ELCA