

Guide My Feet

Luke 1: 68 – 79

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I. Introduction

A. Christian author, Philip Yancey, tells this story –

1. Once a friend of mine went swimming in a large lake at dusk. As he was paddling at a leisurely pace about 100 yards offshore, a freak evening fog rolled in across the water. Suddenly he could see nothing: no horizon, no landmarks, no objects or lights on shore. Because the fog diffused all light, he could not even discern which direction the sun was setting.
2. For thirty minutes my friend splashed around in panic. He would start off in one direction, lose confidence, and turn ninety degrees to the right. Or left--it made no difference which way he turned. He would stop and float, trying to conserve energy, and concentrate on breathing slower. Then he would strike out again, blindly, of course, for he had lost all orientation. He was utterly lost until, finally, he heard voices calling from shore and was able to guide himself by the sounds.
3. The kind of faith God wants, Yancey continues, seems to develop best when everything fuzzes over, when the lights get turned off, when the Fog rolls in. For where there is no opportunity for doubt, there is no longer any opportunity for faith either. End quote

A. We may sometimes think of Christian faith as being the opposite of doubt

1. After all, scripture tells us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for
 - a. The evidence of things we cannot see
2. What I would like for us to consider this morning, is the thought
 - a. That faith does not always do away with the fog, so that we can see clearly
3. Sometimes it only provides a sense of direction, like the voices calling from the shore
 - a. So that even though we cannot see the way ahead of us clearly
 - (1) We can swim, or walk, in that direction with confidence
 - b. Trusting that our destination is secure
 - (1) Even when the path remains filled with uncertainty and doubt

A. It was the philosopher, Plato, who once said –

1. Conversion is not [about] implanting eyes, for they exist already

a. But [it is about] giving them direction, which they have not.

II. In our scripture text today, we hear the words of a man named Zechariah

A. Who not only had his physical sight restored

1. But he also was given a vision that provided spiritual direction

A. A vision of God bursting into the world of human existence, into our world

1. In a way that would give light to those who sit in darkness

a. And would “guide our feet” into the way of peace

A. May our prayer this morning, this second Sunday of Advent, be –

1. God, guide my feet into your way of peace

III. The setting for our text is found earlier in the first chapter of Luke

A. Where we hear about Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth

1. Upright people of God, but growing older in years, and childless

A. Zechariah is a priest, and one day, while serving in the temple

1. An angel appears to him with the message that Elizabeth will have a son

a. Now, there’s a clear word of direction for you!

A. But, being the practical man that he is, Zechariah wonders how this can happen

1. Particularly for a couple their age

A. However, the angel, Gabriel, affirms that the message is truly from God

1. And because of his doubt, Zechariah will be unable to speak

a. Until the time arrives for the baby to be born

2. That may have seemed a little unfair to Zechariah, or at least it does to me

a. But it was also a sign that God was breaking into their world

3. And I’m sure Zechariah and Elizabeth would need that assurance in days to come

A. In the next verses, we hear another amazing message carried by an angel

1. This time to a young Galilean woman named Mary

a. Who is engaged, but not married, to her fiancé, Joseph

A. Mary is also going to have a baby son, who is to be named Jesus

1. And in her excitement, or her distress, or both

a. Mary goes to visit her aunt, who is none other than Zechariah’s wife, Elizabeth

2. And with Elizabeth’s confirmation of the wonder of what God is doing

a. We hear the wonderful statement we know as the Magnificat, or Mary’s Song

(1) Praising God for the salvation and redemption

(a) That God is bringing into the world through the birth of her son

3. God, “Bursting in and Breaking out”
 - A. That is a theme that runs throughout the scripture passages we are looking at
 1. During the Advent season this year – you will see it printed in the bulletin each week
 - a. And you can perhaps visualize it in the decorations Julia is using
 2. In all the vastness of the universe, a great and all-powerful God
 - a. Bursts into our world, and into the lives of individuals just like you and me
 - (1) Bringing new life and hope for all humankind
 - A. And I don’t know of any stories in all of scripture that more vividly describe
 1. God bursting into the world, and into the lives of ordinary people
 - a. Than these stories of two babies that are to be born
 - (1) To the most unlikely sets of parents that I can think of
 2. To a couple too old to have children – well, we heard of that with Abraham and Sarah, too, so that’s not a first but it’s clearly an act of God
 - a. And to a young, unmarried couple – well, that wouldn’t be so unusual either
 - (1) Except that this pregnancy didn’t involve an earthly father
 - (a) It was instigated and carried out through the power of the Holy Spirit
 - A. The only stories I know of that rival the unexpectedness of God’s action there
 1. Is when I think of how God has burst onto the scene in my own life
 - a. Not as dramatically, perhaps – and certainly not involving the birth of a baby
 2. But just as assuredly, bringing about new life
 - a. A new heart, and a new relationship with God
 3. And I can still remember clearly, the sense of peace that I felt
 - a. When, kneeling by the side of my parent’s bed, I confessed my sin
 - (1) And asked Jesus to come into my heart
 4. And God has continued to break into the normal routine of my life from time to time
 - a. Calling me to new understandings of his love and forgiveness
 - (1) Inviting me to deeper levels of commitment
 - b. Calling me to leave the security of my home, my job, my family
 - (1) To become a preacher, for heaven’s sake!!!
 5. Not always giving me a clear vision of the way ahead
 - a. I probably would have been even more doubtful than Zechariah
 - (1) But giving me a sense of direction and purpose
 - A. I would expect that many of you could tell similar stories from your life

1. Of God breaking in, perhaps in unusual ways, to bring about new life
- A. And that is what I hear in the words of our text
 1. Words that were spoken by Zechariah after the birth of his promised son
 - a. Words that could only be spoken after the use of his tongue was restored
 - (1) And Zechariah was filled in a new way with the Holy Spirit of God
- A. And note what he says, after months of pondering the message of the angel -
 1. Blessed be the God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people
 - a. God wasn't only bursting into the lives of Zechariah and Elizabeth
 - (1) And Mary and Joseph – God was looking with favor upon his people
 2. God has a plan to redeem his people, he is giving them a Savior, Zechariah says
 - a. Just as God had promised, and as the prophets had said in times past
 3. This savior/redeemer would deliver the people from the power of their enemies
 - a. **So that** “we might serve him without fear”
- A. I've always found it interesting that whenever God speaks directly to humans
 1. There is often an initial response of fear
- A. That makes sense when we consider the awful greatness and power of Almighty God
 1. But the end result of God bursting into our lives
 - a. Is that we can be delivered from our fear
 - (1) Fear of the things belonging to this world anyway
- A. The world in which Zechariah lived was certainly a fearful one
 1. The land was occupied by the Roman Empire and its military forces
 - a. Jewish religious leaders seemed more eager to secure their own position and whatever power they could than to help people know/understand God
 2. Even among the most righteous people in the land at that time
 - a. It surely felt as though the God of their ancestors was far away
 3. And for those who may have been seeking direction from God
 - a. It must have seemed like they, too, were swimming in a cloud of fog
 - (1) Just as it might seem to some of us living in our world today
- A. But Zechariah heard the sound of voices from the shore
 1. He was given a sense of the direction God was moving in his world
 - a. I can't imagine that he understood the vision perfectly
 - (1) Maybe not even the words that he spoke
 2. But there was enough of a glimpse, enough understanding, for him to say -

- a. You, my son, have been sent to prepare the way for the Savior
- A. You, John – who would later become known as John, the Baptist –
 - 1. You are coming to help us prepare for the Lord's coming
- A. God is doing something as new as the dawn of a new day
 - 1. Light is breaking into the darkness of our world and our lives
 - a. And that light will lead us in a specific direction – even through the fog
 - (1) It will guide our feet into the way of peace
- A. Peace comes in many forms – I was reminded of that by a story I read this week
 - 1. By Michele Hardie, of Holland, Michigan who writes - Advent was one week away
 - a. So we thought we'd see what the children remembered from our family devotions the year before.
 - 2. "Who can tell me what the four candles in the Advent wreath represent?" I asked.
 - a. Luke jumped in with seven-year-old wisdom and exuberance. "There's love, joy, peace, and ... and ... "
 - (1) "I know!" six-year-old Elise interrupted to finish her brother's sentence:
 - (a) "Peace and quiet!"
 - 3. There are times when that is the kind of peace we long for in our lives
- A. But even more than that, I believe every human being has a deep longing for peace
 - 1. The peace that Zechariah was talking about when he speaks of God
 - a. Looking with favor upon his people
 - 2. There's no greater peace than knowing that God is looking at me...and smiling
 - a. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace
 - (1) As the wonderful benediction prayer says
 - 3. But then I must also learn to be at peace with myself
 - a. Learn to trust that God has a plan and a purpose for my life
 - (1) No matter how confused and mixed up my circumstances seem to be
 - 4. And we must learn to follow the light that God has given us
 - a. To walk in the ways that lead to peace – peace with God, peace with our world
 - (1) And with each other
- A. We may sometimes wish that God would speak to us directly
 - 1. Give us direction for our lives or guidance for what God wants us to do
 - a. And that may happen at times
 - 2. But much of the time, or at least this is the way I experience it

- a. The directions are already there, if I'm willing to accept them
 - 3. The guidance has already been given, through the Word of God, the scriptures
 - a. If I am willing to look for it, and then to be obedient
 - A. John Bunyan once said - He that is humble ever shall have God to be his guide.
 - 1. Or as the poem by Joyce Kilmer says –
 - a. Because the way was steep and long, and through a strange and lonely land
 - (1) God placed upon my lips a song and put a lantern in my hand.
- IV. Today, and especially in this season of Advent, I trust that we are looking for God to guide us
- A. And perhaps that guidance will come in some unusual way
 - 1. An angel visitation, or in some physical manifestation of great power and might
 - A. Or perhaps we will find God speaking to us in our quiet meditation on his Word
 - 1. A thought shared by a sister or a brother, who knows, maybe in a sermon
 - A. And whether our life is such that it feels like we are paddling around in a fog
 - 1. Or if we are walking confidently in the light that we have already been given
 - a. I believe without a doubt that God is still at work, in and through us
 - 2. Because God's plans for our world are always bigger than the plans we make
 - A. And sooner or later, God will burst into our world once again, to give us light
 - 1. To take away our fear, and to give us guidance into his ways of peace
 - a. Loving and gracious God, guide my feet. Amen