

Christmas II: On the Third Day

Luke 2:41-52

The Reverend Paul D. Allick, The Church of the Advent, January 5, 2019

I have a tapestry hanging in my prayer room. It is an image of a unicorn tied to a tree sitting within a small corral. It symbolizes the Incarnation. The symbolism goes back to the early church and was popular in the Middle Ages.

A harnessed unicorn is like the mystery of God becoming one of us. The Logos, the logic and wisdom of the Universe become human.

Today we hear how the Word of God at twelve years of age went to the Temple to take part in theological discourse. His elders are amazed at this young man's inherent wisdom. His parents not so much.

They are frantically searching for him. When they find him, he asks "Why are you surprised? Didn't you know the Word of God would be right where we all believe God Dwells on earth? Right here in this Temple?"

Mary ponders this. She is going to have to adjust a bit to be a mother to this child. She will need to give him some room. After all, this young man is living like a mystical unicorn tied to a tree in a small corral.

It makes sense that he was dwelling there in the Temple the whole time. The last place you'd look for a young person but the first place you look for the Word dwelling among us.

And it made sense that he would be found on the third day. The Word always seems to become fully known after three days.

According to the 19th chapter of Exodus, it was on the third day that God came down to speak to the people after their escape from Egypt. He came to them in a dense cloud as to not overwhelm them with his direct presence. He appears as they can understand and makes covenant with them. God gives them the first glimpse at his Almighty Word. The Word that will eventually make all of us a holy people.

The Word that would be spoken through the prophets. It is the Word Jonah ran away with so that God sent him into the belly of a fish for three days to think it over. On the third day, both prophet and Word were spit out and God's judgment and redemption were given to the gentiles of Nineveh.

At the end of his earthly journey, Jesus again disappears for three days. On the third day the Word bursts forth from the tomb and now all who believe in his Name become prophets and priests of the Gospel.

In Scripture, three days often represents a time of isolation and searching. It is also a time of maturing and pondering.

Many of us experience our own three days. It can be brought on in many ways: illness, depression, broken relationships, missed opportunities, stress, grief. Many of us are right now are seeking a deeper understanding of God and our current circumstances.

We wait for a word from God. And when we hear it, at least in my experience, the answers are never what we expect but they make sense.

It is hard to keep faith while you are in the tomb, or in the belly of the fish, or anticipating God appearing in a dense cloud. But we must remember his promise, "Tear down this temple and in three days I will rebuild it."

There is nothing that can be torn down in our lives that God will not redeem. It won't be redeemed on our time table or by our design but it will be redeemed.

The two disciples on their way to Emmaus had given up. It had been three days since Jesus was executed. It was all over. And then that mysterious stranger opens the Word for them and breaks the bread. The dense cloud parted and they saw God face to face.

When some pharisees warn to Jesus to flee because Herod wants to kill him, Jesus retorts, and promises again, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.'" Luke 13:31-33

God is here dwelling among us. Obviously, God is here in Word and Sacrament but where else do you see God dwelling among us? What work is God doing in this congregation? In this neighborhood? In your life? What is God up to? When was the last time you stopped to ponder that question?

Are you in the tomb? God is up to something. Are you in the belly of the fish? What are holding back from God? Is your vision of God cloudy? What will you do to clear your head? Are you frantically searching for God? God will find you. But as Mary and Joseph can tell you, sometimes three days feels like forever.