

All I Want for Christmas WEEK THREE December 17, 2023

Do God's will: heal the brokenhearted

I was out of town last weekend and my trip involved air travel.

On the plane I watched the movie,

A Haunting in Venice.

It's based on a novel by Agatha Christie

featuring the most famous fictional detective,

Hercule Poirot.

It was entertaining and held my attention for a few hours.

And like all good detective stories, it kept me guessing til the very end whodunnit.

Among all the characters, no one is who they seemed to be.

I think the reason these stories appeal to me and so many others

is because they raise important questions about human nature.

They force you to wonder, is anyone who they seem to be?

Who am I? And who are you?

SCREEN: All I Want for Christmas main screen

This is week three of our Advent message series titled, All I Want for Christmas.

The scripture readings this month remind us that

our focus in life shouldn't be on what we want but on what God wants for us.

God is like a master detective - he knows exactly who we are.

Knows us inside and out.

God knows our faults and failings and weaknesses

and still loves us unconditionally.

Another thing God knows about us is what

we are capable of.

God sees our true potential.

Today's readings, solve the mystery of what God wants us to do

when it comes to helping others.

God calls us to heal the brokenhearted.

To heal the brokenhearted.

This is the third week in a row when we heard from the Prophet Isaiah.

God's Chosen People had forgotten who they were.

They'd lost sight of their mission,

so he sent Isaiah to remind them.

Here's part of what Isaiah told them they must do:

SCREEN: The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,

because the LORD has anointed me;

he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor,

to heal the brokenhearted,

to proclaim liberty to the captives

and release to the prisoners,

to announce a year of favor from the LORD

and a day of vindication by our God.

So what should the Chosen People do to rediscover their purpose in life?

Isaiah said they should heal the brokenhearted.

Those who claim to be God's children

reveal who they are by how they treat others.

They care for the poor, the hurting, and the imprisoned.

In the Gospel reading we just heard,

John the Baptist quoted the Prophet Isaiah.

He too was sent to remind God's Chosen People

who they are.

John challenged them to get back on track -

to change their lives and to care for those in need.

So how does this message from thousands of years ago apply to us?

Well, it's no great mystery.

Everywhere we turn we encounter people who need our help.

The poor, the hungry, the sick or hurting.

As well as those imprisoned by fear or worry, loneliness or doubt.

And our faith requires us to do whatever we can to help them.

Last Sunday evening we held our Advent event called GIVE.

I want to thank all those who made GIVE such a big success.

Hundreds of people experienced holiday cheer
and reconnected with the Nativity story.
And we collected a ton of donations for our Giving Tree.
Donations which will go to the Gabriel Network, which assists
women with unplanned pregnancies,
as well as Assumption Church in DC
and the Bowie Interfaith Food Pantry.
Because of our parishioners' generosity,
many people will now have a very merry Christmas.
But there were some other amazing things that happened at GIVE,
thanks to our volunteers.

It was a rainy night when guests arrived,
so our outdoor greeters took it upon themselves to grab umbrellas,
walk out to each car and escort people into the building.
Once inside, other greeters walked them down to the hall
where the Living Nativity was set up.
Visitors had a chance to visit with Santa and Mrs. Claus,
spend time in church listening to our choirs
or enjoy cookies and cocoa.

That spirit of welcome and radical hospitality was
repeated over and over throughout the night.

SCREEN: radical hospitality

Radical hospitality - it means being gracious, generous and
helpful in an overwhelming way.

With radical hospitality, you go above and beyond
what is expected or required.

It means putting the needs and feelings of others ahead of one's own.

With radical hospitality, you come first, not me.

GIVE is one example of our parish commitment to doing the very things
Isaiah and John the Baptist preached.

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas,

I want to ask you to extend radical hospitality to others.

Let me mention two ways you can do this.

SCREEN: Christmas Greeter screen

First, we know that many visitors and guests will choose to worship with us at Christmas.

You can extend radical hospitality by volunteering as a greeter at one of Christmas Masses.

Our greeters are so essential because they give the first impression to anyone who walks through our doors.

And greeting is one of our easiest ministries.

On Christmas our greeters simply smile, or wave, say “Merry Christmas” and open a door.

Today after Mass in our entranceway you can sign up to be a Christmas greeter. So that’s the first way you can extend radical hospitality, here’s the second.

SCREEN: Christmas invite card screen

Everyone here knows someone who does not currently have a church home.

Consider inviting them to join you for Christmas Mass.

At the exits you can grab some of these Christmas invite cards and give them to a family member, friend, co-worker or neighbor.

Ask them to join you here on Christmas.

These are two simple ways you can practice radical hospitality.

And if you choose to do these things, not only will you be helping others to have a merry Christmas but I guarantee God will bless you with renewed happiness and joy.

In this last week of Advent, ask the Lord to help you to share your faith.

May you rediscover your purpose in life as you

help others discover who God is. Amen. +