

SERMON FOLLOWED BY SERVICE

Advent Wednesday - December 12, 2012

De-Stress from December's Dollar Distress

It would start in October when the Christmas catalogs came out - "I want this ... and this ... and this ... and this." Now with online catalogues all year round, I can't image it's gotten any easier. Then in November came Black Friday with its toxic cloud spewing discontent: "I need more and more and more." Now in December - we turn up the furnace and up goes the bill. We pull out our winter clothes - "May have looked good last year; not this year. May have fit last year; not this year." Last year we wore our masks; this year, not so much and we're coughing and hacking our way to the doctor and drugstore. Now it's Christmas lights and trees and parties.

Are you feeling it - the December dollar distress? Or do you have it set so the pain doesn't hit until January? Pushing the pain into January doesn't make it feel much better does it? So what's the answer?

Part of the answer is a reality check. Not just a budget check or a spending check. Those are important, but there's a more important reality check - not a check of numbers on a page, but a check of 1 number, number 1 in your heart. What do the numbers tell you - what race are you trying to run? The race to keep up with your neighbors? The advertisers' race? "You see it; you want it; you need it; you just gotta have it; you deserve it; everybody else has it." Or the race to walk and work with God? Or are we trying to keep a leg in each race?

A good tool to help us figure out which race we are running, is the budget/spending check. In fact, if I don't run a budget/spending check, do I really know where I am putting the money God has entrusted to me?

If we're trying to keep up with the neighbors, or the advertisers, or to keep a leg in all those races ... it's time for a reality check! It doesn't matter whether we have the dollars to run all the races or not. It's time for a reality check.

It can be easy to think that budget/spending checks are for those who don't have enough money. A budget/ spending check can be more important for people who do have enough money. God has a higher goal for us and our money than just meeting our money needs; he has us here with money, not just to consume, but to be his blessings to the world.

Do you know where your race is going? The race to keep up with the neighbors is a race to fill up the junkyard ... that's right, all the stuff of this world turns to junk. And the race of the advertisers - I see, I like, I want, I need, I have to have, I buy - that's a race to be a puppet. How many of us here like being a puppet, an advertiser's puppet? Not many of us, I imagine.

How soon on the slide - "I see, I like, I want, I need, I have to have, I buy" - do you have to catch yourself before you're strung along to the end? How can you escape the slide?

The sad thing is, some days we don't know which race we're running. We might think we're running God's race. We fold our hands and pray; we hold out our hands for God to give to us. But when God says "**whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will reap generously**" how many of us don't turtle, pull back, rationalize, blame, excuse. We try to keep a leg in God's race and another leg in the world's money and stuff race, but what did Jesus say? "**You can't serve both God and mammon; you can't serve both God and money and stuff.**"

You might be thinking; "I came here to de-stress, but with what you're saying, I'm not feeling the peace." Well, the Spirit of Christ isn't into working fake peace. If we're running the wrong race, we shouldn't expect him to cheer us - "Way to go! I've got you covered." That's why the reality check. If we're not on the right road, we're not going to get to peace. So how can we get free from being an advertiser's puppet? How can we keep both our feet in the right race? How can we de-stress from December's dollar distress?

Here's the reality Jesus offers - "**Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things [everything you need] will be given to you as well.**" You've heard Mary: With God it's not the proud, the rich, the powerful who get ahead. "He lifts up the humble! He fills the hungry with good things! He remembers, he will show mercy to his people forever!" And you know Paul: "**My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.**"

What helps you to see the difference between needs and wants?

I may not have all the stuff my family, friends, and neighbors have; I may not get to do all the things my family, friends and neighbors do. We may not be able to buy and give like some people do. But that's ok. I've seen parents without money for food spending big bucks on baby toys, toys that sit unused as their kids play with the empty box and wrapping paper. We don't have to spend big to share happiness and love. I remember a couple - he had a chip on his shoulders and he had to be buying new tools, new equipment, new toys to make him feel good about himself. Meanwhile, his wife had a different hurt in her heart; she had to buy and give, buy and give, buy and give to feel good about herself. They didn't see it, but buying gave both of them a feel-good high, a feel-good high that just couldn't last. We don't have to fall into that trap. We don't need to get more or give more to feel good about ourselves. We have Jesus.

With Jesus, we have something better than spending and stuff to make us feel good about ourselves. With Jesus, we have something better than spending and stuff to cover over our guilt. With Jesus, we have connections! Connections better than knowing someone at the bank. Connections better than having a rich uncle. You have the Jesus who owns the universe. He made it; he owns it; but he's already put your name on it. Today he shares it piece by piece, some days more, some days less; more for some, less for others - but for you he never gives less than what we need, always enough to make it with him. Today he shares the riches of this world piece by piece, but some day he will share with you the riches of heaven, an inheritance for you that will never perish, spoil, or fade. It's good to sit back and think about this: You have connections to the Lord of heaven, and he says the riches of heaven are yours.

Some days those connections might seem far, far away. Like he doesn't understand. Like he doesn't care. Like he's cut us off. Jesus understands better than we do what it's like to go without. He knows what it's like to sleep in a feeding trough. He knows what it's like to be used for money. He knows what it's like to die penniless without a shirt on his back. And he knows what it's like to be cut off. Jesus understands and he cares. That's why he came here, because we were cut off. He came here as the little babe of Bethlehem, to be Immanuel, God-with-Us, to connect us with God. He came as one of us to pay our debt to God, to pay for all of us. On the cross, shirtless and penniless he paid with his blood. From the cross he shouted, shirtless and penniless: "It is finished; paid in full!" Shirtless and penniless, he came in poverty to bring us the riches of God. And today he shares with you the riches of heaven - "You are forgiven, full and free. No matter

what you have or don't have - you have all the love of God looking out for you, all the riches of heaven in store for you.”

In the manger and at the cross we get to see a new economic reality. We have something better than spending and stuff to make us feel worthwhile ... something better than spending and stuff to make us feel happy and loved ... we have Jesus. And with Jesus, God will meet all our needs today and forever! Amen.

How have you seen God use his storehouse to provide - in Scripture, in lives of people around you, in your life?

DE-STRESS FROM DECEMBER DISTRESS

DISTRESSED WITH MONEY STRESS?
DE-STRESS WITH TRUE TREASURE IN JESUS!

HYMN

“From Heaven Above to Earth I Come”

Hymn 331 v. 7-13

M: O Lord, open my lips.

C: **And my mouth shall declare your praise.**

M: Hasten to save me, O God.

C: **O Lord, come quickly to help me.**

M: The Lord be with you.

C: **And also with you.**

M: Lord God, you have brought us safely to this hour of evening prayer. We thank you for providing all that we need for body and life. Bless us who have gathered in your name. Forgive our sins. Speak to our hearts. Dispel our sorrows with the comfort of your Word, and receive our hymns of thanks and praise, through Jesus Christ, our living Savior, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: **Amen.**

HYMN

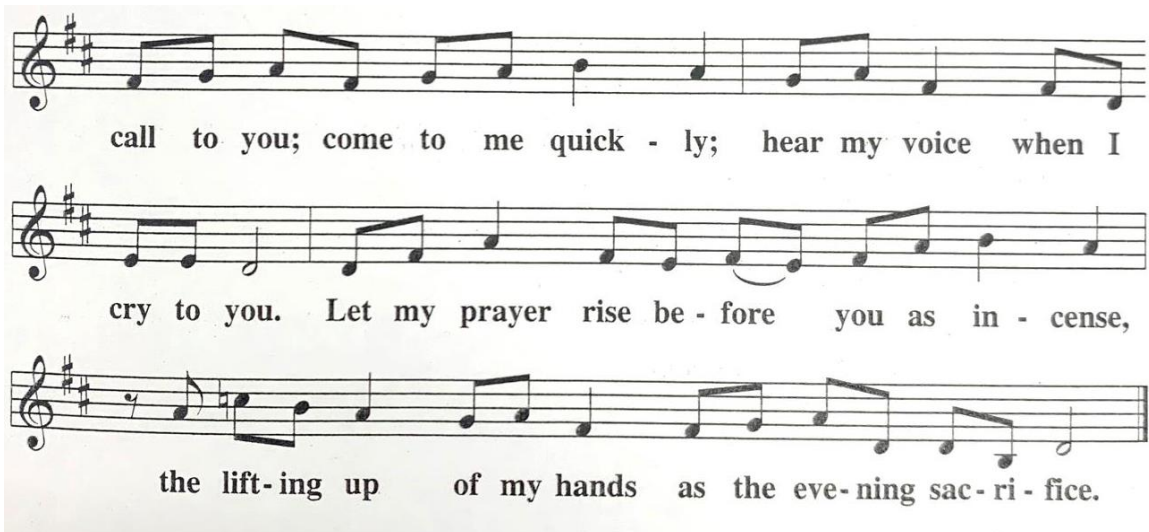
“Let My Prayer Rise Before You”



C: Let my prayer rise be - fore you as in - cense, the lift - ing



up of my hands as the eve - ning sac - ri - fice. O Lord, I



call to you; come to me quick - ly; hear my voice when I
cry to you. Let my prayer rise be - fore you as in - cense,
the lift - ing up of my hands as the eve - ning sac - ri - fice.

PRAYER

M: Let our prayers be acceptable in your sight. Come and help us in time of need that way we may sing your praise in holy joy now and forever, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

PSALM 73

Refrain



Sure-ly, it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and
not be a - fraid. For the Lord is my strong-hold and my
sure de-fense, and he will be my Sav - ior.

Psalm tone



*

I am always with `you, O Lord,*
you hold me by my `right hand.

You guide me with your `counsel,*
and afterward you will take me into `glory.

Whom have I in heav`en but you?*

and earth has nothing I desire be`sides you.

My flesh and my `heart may fail,*
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion for`ever.

**Glory be to the Father and `to the Son*
and to the Holy `Spirit,
as it was in the be`ginning,*
is now, and will be forever. `Amen.**

Refrain

PSALM PRAYER

M: Lord Jesus, we are shortsighted and focus only on this life. We try to make this earth our perfect home and become discontent when life goes better for the wicked than it does for us. Turn our eyes toward you, and help us to live each day with the confidence that heaven is our ultimate and perfect home, for there we will live with you and the Father and the Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

LESSON

Luke 1:46-55

This Advent season our three Wednesday lessons will be the three songs from the Gospel of Luke.

And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me -
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
even as he said to our fathers."

HYMN

"O Jesus Christ, Your Manger Is"
Hymn 342

SERMON

Psalm 73:25-26

Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.

"Song of Mary"

My soul pro-claims the great-nesss of the Lord; my spir-it re-joic-es in God my Sav-ior.

for he has looked with fa - vor on his low - ly ser - vant

From this day all gen - er - a - tions will call me bless - ed.

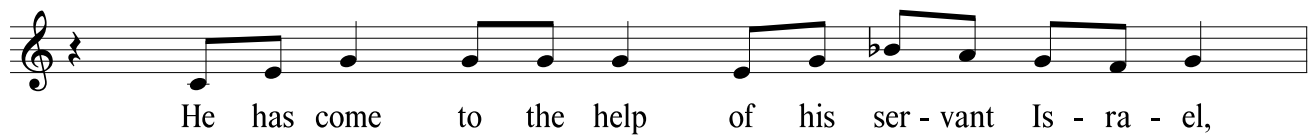
The Al - migh - y has done great things for me, and ho - ly is his name.

He has mer - cy on those who fear him in ev - 'ry gen - er - a - tion

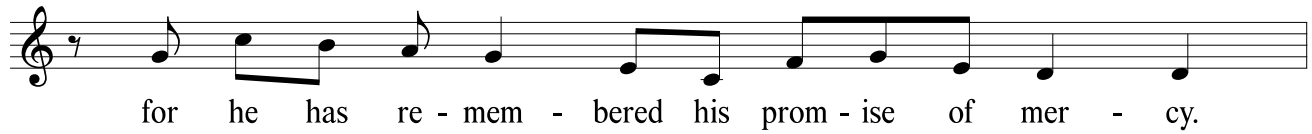
He has shown the strength of his arm he has scat-tered the proud in their con-ceit.

He has cast down the might-y from their thrones and has lift-ed up the low - ly.

He has filled the hun-gry with good things, and the rich he has sent a-way emp-ty.



He has come to the help of his ser - vant Is - ra - el,



for he has re - mem - bered his prom - ise of mer - cy.



the prom-ise made to our fa - thers, to A-bra-ham and to his chil-dren for-ev-er. A-men.

PRAYER

M: In the closing hours of this day, hear us as we pray, O Lord:

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: For the well-being of people everywhere, for the growth of your church in all the world, and for the strengthening of all who serve and worship here, we pray, O Lord:

C: **Christ, have mercy.**

M: For one another, young and old, for your blessings that come with every stage of life, and for joy in doing your will, we pray, O Lord:

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: For our public servants who work day and night to bring protection, justice, learning, and health to this and every place, we pray to you, O Lord:

C: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

M: For favorable weather and bountiful harvests, for clothing and food, for health of body, mind, and spirit, and for deliverance from all sin and every form of evil, we pray to you, O Lord:

C: **Lord, hear our prayer.**

M: For the faithful who have gone before us, who have shared with us your good news, whose souls are now at rest in your heavenly kingdom, we give you thanks, O Lord:

C: **Thanks be to God.**

M: In thanksgiving for your many and varied gifts to us, we now commend ourselves to your care. Be our shield and strength, O Lord.

C: **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

PRAYER FOR PEACE

M: Lord God, all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works come from you. Give to us, your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey your commandments. Defend us also from the fear of our enemies that we may live in peace and quietness, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: **Amen.**

BLESSING

M: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C: **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

"All Praise to Thee, My God, This Night"

Hymn 789

OFFERING

If you prefer online giving, you may scan this code with your mobile device.



Pastor Kevin Raddatz
Principal Jon Woldt
501 West Park Avenue
Libertyville, IL 60048
847-362-4424
www.StJohnsLib.com

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Join Us For Wednesday Advent Worship!

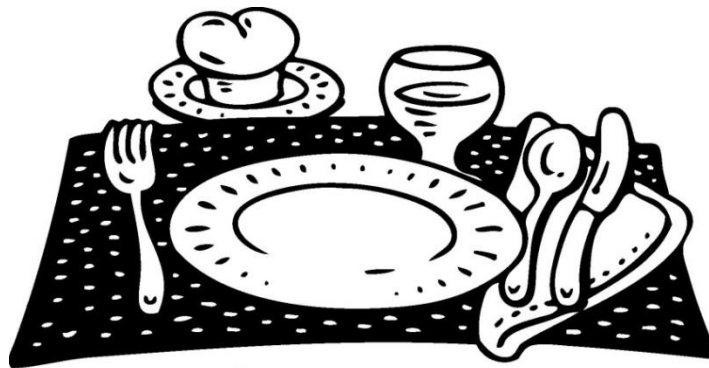
De-Stress from December Distress

Wednesday, December 15, at 3:30 and 6:30:

Distressed with Family Stress?

De-Stress with Jesus as Your Brother!

- Advent Supper at 4:30 pm - Hosted by St. John Youth Group



Advent
SUPPER