

Connecting the Dots

Luke 3:1-6

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

((Holding up a large poster of the game “connecting-the-dots”))) Do you know what this is? It has numbers and dots on it. That’s right it is a game of connecting the dots. Let see if we start here and go here and then here we start to guess what this is. It begins to become obvious doesn’t it with just a few more lines. By now you all can guess what this is? Right a Christmas Tree. And even though we are not completely done, we already know how this is going to turn out. The prophecies of the Good News of Jesus Christ are very much like this game.

Throughout the Old Testament there are prophecies declaring the coming of the Lord. However, just as with the children’s game of connecting the dots, the exact picture is not completely seen. It is a bit out of focus. The exact numbering of when or the order of the lines are a bit unclear. As we read the lesson from the book of Malachi, we know that the one sent from God is coming... We know that God made an everlasting covenant with the people of Israel... We know that several times, the people of Israel have broken the covenant and turned away from God and were corrupted... We also know that several times God accepted them back again and cleansed them as if refining silver....However the picture is still very unclear as to their future and the coming of the Lord.

In today’s reading from Malachi, we experience an author that is prophesying...that is he is trying to draw the lines to connect the dots to finish the picture and make it clear to all. The people are corrupt and still turning away from God. They have fallen under a foreign ruler for a number of years. And the people have lost hope in a God that no longer can be ascribed to the temple since the temple has been destroyed. And so Malachi brings the picture to the people by drawing three more lines to make his message heard.

One is that a messenger will be sent before the people to prepare them for the coming of the Lord. The people had lost faith in God. The temple, the place where God resided had been destroyed and worship was happening rightly. They didn’t know where God was and how to find their way again, they were in turmoil and lost. So Malachi prophesies that there will be one who is coming that will point to the Lord. The messenger will come as the one who will prepare the way of the Lord.

The second line that Malachi draws is the fact that the Lord is the one who is coming. The Lord will come back to the chosen people. Despite the rough times that they are in and

the fact that the enemy is overpowering, God will be with them. God who has such strength and might that no one can stand against his glory, that Lord will be with them.

The third line that Malachi draws makes the entire picture clear, the hidden meaning is finally revealed, we can now guess where this picture is going, because we hear Malachi prophesying that the Lord is coming to make people righteous. God will purify all people for their wrong doings and the evil, and refine that fallenness out of them as if purifying silver. God will give salvation back to the people, as in the days of old.

Now the hidden picture, the hidden message, the meaning of what the Old Testament is leading us up to has been made clearer. But still like a child's picture of connecting the dots it is not complete, still a little off, just not right. We can predict where it is going and predict what it will be like, but the actual details are not finished yet.

500 years later, a new prophet appears on the scene in Judea, to tell of the Lord's coming. In the reading from Malachi we see the promise that a messenger will be sent before the people to prepare the way of the coming of God. And lo and behold John being filled with the Holy Spirit since in his mother's womb, and hearing the word of the Lord in the wilderness goes out to the people proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The picture which was begun back in the Old testament times with the prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Malachi, has been fully finished here with John's last lines to finish the fullness of the message. He finishes connecting the last of the dots. The picture that was hazy and unclear is now made straight and perfect. John shows us the picture of the coming of the Christ, proclaiming this message. And just like Malachi, John had three lines to finish this picture and make it complete.

One line that John draws is the message that we should be baptized into repentance. The world was and is full of corrupt people who had no regard for the Word of the Lord. John heard the word of God and had reverence for it and told others that they should also obey the Word of God. To turn literally from our sinful selves and return to the ways of God, seeking the forgiveness of God.

The second line that John brings forth on the picture is the preparation for the coming king. Get everything ready the Lord is coming. How much do you do to get ready for family dinner on Christmas? Cooking, baking, cleaning, decorating. Now Imagine the emphasis John says we should put in preparing for the Lord of all creation that is coming, make the valleys level, knock down the mountains and hills, straighten and smooth out the crooked and rough places. Get ready make the way clear, the Lord is coming. Get ready.

Thirdly, John finishes the connect the dots picture by foreseeing the purpose of the coming of the Lord. The Lord will come so that all flesh, all humanity, all living creation... shall see... shall feel... shall know the salvation of God. The Lord is coming to bring salvation to all. The coming of the Lord that we celebrate at Christmas is all to prepare the way for the salvation won for us at Easter, the sacrifice for our sins, the blood and body shed for us, the death that we deserve, the resurrection and life everlasting of the glorious empty grave. The salvation of God will come!

The picture is now completed. The entire message has been drawn out line to line, dot to dot. This advent season is a time to look at the picture that was drawn out for each one of us. To experience what it took for the coming of God into this world, what it means for each one of us, the power and glory of this message, the hope that is eternal and everlasting. The words of the prophets have come to pass and we see now clearly the salvation that has been won for us through Jesus Christ the fulfillment of God's word.

But also during this advent season it is our turn to be like Malachi and to be like John, because there are many that still can not see the completed picture. They can not connect the dots and see the hopeful, joyful promise that is everlasting. We are called on to be the prophets that tell others the good news of the coming of our Lord. The salvation won for them through the incarnation of the Lord. We are members of the body of believers who are to be making the hilly paths smooth and the crooked ways straight. The dots are there for us to make the picture so that all people can see, all people be they neighbors or friends, relatives or strangers, old or young.

The picture of Jesus' coming has been made clear, but we also know that the picture of his return is still being completed. The advent of the Lord's coming continues not just for these four weeks in December but throughout our lives until all people stand before the Lord. Let us hear the words of the prophets and work together as God's people to prepare the way of the Lord. That day is coming. The dots are there, the lines are being drawn, prepare for the way of the Lord. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come.

AMEN.

Let us pray for the whole People of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Lord Almighty, we gather as your family this day, coming from all places all backgrounds to be in your house of worship. We give you thanks for calling us here this day, for creation, for nourishment, and happiness and the promise of eternal life. We give thanks

for the greatest gift of your son, our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. You have changed us and made us your children in your one eternal family. Continue to empower us to be your witness, bearing fruits in righteousness.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer

Almighty Lord, let us not forget all the places in the world that are so in need of your touch this day. Those places of death and hurt, those places of pain and suffering. Where abuse, war, violence, crime, storms, cold and heat challenge the safety of People - we ask that you would be there to grant comfort. Even on this week when billions upon billions are being spent in material goods for holiday gifts, let us not forget the hungry, those starving around the world from malnutrition, those who are insufficiently clothed or homeless, those suffering with diseases and illnesses. Send your spirit of comfort and healing, to lift up your humanity so that we can care for each other in a world that has plenty. Empower us this day to care for each other and to support each other throughout the world as you would have us do.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer

Gracious Father, we pray for your Holy Church. As disciples of Christ we are given a message to the world. A message that must be shared with all those who have lost their way and are seeking their own redemption. Send the Gift of your Spirit to remind people that Christ died for all people. Christ redeems all people from all nations. Send that spirit of comfort and strength to move this congregation to claim the calling you have bestowed on us, to drive us forward as your servants and as your witnesses throughout this community and throughout the world.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, comfort all those who are in pain this day. Strengthen those who are weak and suffering. Grant your healing touch to be with all those who are afflicted with illness, troubled by adversity, depressed with worry. Be with all those that will be dealing with physical and mental anguish. Be with the comforters and helpers who give of their lives and so that others may see and feel the hope and love through them. Be with the military and all who serve this nation, so that no matter what may come they may now they are in your protection. Be with those who mourn the loss of loved ones. Lord each of us come with prayerful minds and heavy hearts to lift up all those needs and to remember all those who are hospitalized, the shut-ins, the hurt and the lonely, and especially Howell Crawford, Dan Keeney, Ashley Storm, and all those who we lift up to you now,

Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.