

**A sermon preached by Rev. Dr. Jason Cashing, Clarence Presbyterian Church
on December 23, 2023.**

KINGDOM REALIZED

<2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Luke 1:26-38>

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you, O Immanuel, our Rock and Redeemer, our Love. Amen.

I'm a "Bluey" fan. For those of you who have young children or grandchildren, this statement likely needs no further explanation. But if the Bluey phenomenon is unfamiliar to you, I'll say in short that it's an animated kids' show where the characters are anthropomorphized dogs. The main character, a blue heeler named Bluey, is 5 or 6 years old. The show's writing has made it wildly popular not only with kids, but with their parents as well, as the show gives an honest appraisal of parenthood.

And there is one episode, without fail, which will always lift my spirits immeasurably: season 1, episode 13. And to quote the show, "This episode of Bluey is called: 'Bike.'"

In it, Bluey is attempting to ride her bike without training wheels, and is frustrated that she is unable to do so. Her expectation is unmet, and her desire is unrealized. In her frustration she exclaims that she wants to be able to "just do it straight away," leaving unsaid that she wants to be able to do this without the ponderous work of practice or learning. She wants her vision to be realized, and realized now. We soon find out that Bluey is not the only child at the playground frustrated with an unrealized desire, and that in truth, all the other kids are likewise frustrated in their own right. The humor of the episode comes in watching all the other characters attempt, in increasingly unsuccessful ways, to achieve their desired goal. The merit of the episode comes in seeing how these characters face such an adversity, and deal with unachieved goals. And of course, a seemingly light-hearted, innocuous melody plays in the back ground...

Our stories from Scripture this morning, as we come to the terminus of our Advent season, likewise bear out the themes of unrealized desire and unmet potential. When it almost seems as if the waiting, the anticipation, the unrealized nature becomes unbearable, we are encouraged with these stories to wait just a bit more.

David, who has finally, *finally* been given rest and deliverance from the opposition he has lived with since being anointed, has a vision now of where his energy and work should go next: a temple for God, to be built in Jerusalem. It's a grand vision, and will be an extravagant design, to say nothing of the gesture. It is a thing that has never been done before, and David will do his part to ensure the presence of God is located in and among the people. Established. He intends to go forward in realizing this vision, in realizing the Divine Presence among the people. He also checks with the prophet, Nathan, to verify his plan and intentions. Nathan, likewise, says it will be a good idea,

and a grand vision to realize. 'Go ahead with your plans, without delay or waiting,' Nathan says, 'for surely God is with you in this.'

Only, as it turns out, David's desire to establish the presence of God and, by extension, to realize the kingdom of God, is one that will have to wait.

Generations later, but only about 100 miles away, a vision full of expectancy comes to an unexpected and un-expecting recipient. Mary, a maid engaged to a carpenter named Joseph, suddenly has an angelic visitor who comes bearing the message that she has been chosen to bear into the world the Messiah, the realization of anticipated and expected hope. It will be a child born to her, as well as the manifestation of all that the People of God yearn to see realized. The promise of the kingdom, and of the king to rule and shepherd it, will soon come to fruition, but first...first, the waiting of pregnancy must occur, as well as the waiting as the child grows and develops. A vision as yet unrealized.

For David, for Mary, for the people who wait in darkness and despair, the words of Bluey might seem imminently applicable, "Why can't I just do this straight away?" For us, on this Fourth Sunday of Advent, we might also be echoing such words in the backs of our minds. The kingdom of God, the realization of the unrealized vision and desire, lays just out of arms' reach, and is yet to be grasped. The waiting for such a reality to be brought to fruition is almost unbearable, to say nothing of frustrating.

In many instances, it can feel as if we go through life waiting - waiting on test results, waiting on news, waiting on peace, waiting for the right time, for the moment to be realized. Waiting.

And in many similar and related instances, it can feel as we go through life with unmet visions and dreams, unrealized hopes and desires. These moments can lead us to feeling "less than," incapable, or leave us wanting.

But such is not the vision of God. And even in our waiting, the realization of our hopes is drawing ever closer. For in love, and from a place of profound, immeasurable/ love, God comes to us, to the world. Not just once, but over and over again, and in this day, God draws nearer still. We could almost say, "This episode of Advent is called, 'Love.'"

Do you remember that description of the episode I mentioned earlier, that all the characters were frustrated because they were trying to realize something that was just out of reach? About mid-way through, they were all feeling much the same way: frustrated, less than, wanting, incapable. And over-laying all these stories, the seemingly light-hearted, innocuous melody. As it turns out, that melody is far from innocuous, and more than just light-hearted background music. Because the music speeds up to its designed speed, grows in volume, and becomes more determinative. What at first sounded like random background music now becomes the driving and defining tone. The characters shift from being frustrated to using their imaginations, their determination, and their skills to develop beyond the limitations that have been

frustrating them in the first place. And the music matches this movement, step for step, until you realize that the music itself reflects the realization of all of our hopes and expectations. Let those with ears to hear, listen!

“Mortals join the happy chorus, which the Morning Stars began. Love divine is reigning o’er us, joining all in heaven’s plan. Ever singing, march we onward, victor in the midst of strife. Joyful music leads us sunward in the triumph song of life.”

Slowly, the characters realize their potential, and their goals are achieved. The song of joy, the song of our living, crescendos as new capabilities are opened and realized.

Brothers and Sisters, in this is the song of Advent. The people of God long to be close to God, to know that the Divine Presence is secure and that they shall dwell in proximity, forevermore. David is not to be the one to bring this to be, but David is given a promise that it shall be realized. Not by him, but by God.

The people yearn to see the Messiah among them, and to know that, in his presence, they shall be God’s people in fullness and the Kingdom of God shall be drawn close. Mary is to be the one through whom this will be realized, and she lives into this. “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” Mary is given a vision and a prophecy to be realized on behalf of the world. Not by her, but through her, by God.

We have been waiting, these past weeks. In many cases and in many ways, we will yet wait. Wait for peace in our world and in our hearts. Wait for justice and equity. Wait for the fullness of the Kingdom of God to be realized. Not by us, but by God. And we have been given a promise, a word of good news, and the capacity to proclaim it and live it, here and now, in the fullest of our capabilities.

This now becomes the realization and the fulfilling of Advent: to recognize the Kingdom of God joyfully in our midst.

In joy, let us sing of God’s love, and its manifestation in our lives and in the world. Let us sing together hymn #611, a hymn of praise, a hymn of joy - “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee.” And may this be our ‘Amen.’