

Rev. Derek Fairman
2nd Sunday of Advent A

Think about a person who is a good person but can be annoying and even at times be obnoxious. Maybe the person means very well, but does not realize that he is being annoying. Maybe the person knows better, but she likes to annoy people anyway. Although you may not wish the person any harm, you would like the person much better if he or she would find a way to be less annoying.

We think about that as we enter into this Second Sunday of Advent. In the Gospel passage that we have heard, St. John the Baptist warns the Pharisees that a day of judgment is coming. It will be a day when the good are separated from the wicked, and a day when the wheat will be gathered in the barn but that the chaff will be thrown into the unquenchable fire. What does this mean?

We remember that St. John the Baptist is known especially for preparing for the coming of the Lord. He prepared the people for the Lord Jesus. Here, however, he speaks of judgment and separating the good from the bad. Well, that is what the Lord Jesus brings. He brings judgment, not just at the end of time, but even now. He helps us to separate the good from the bad even now. This is important for us as we continue our Advent journey.

We have to remember that in Heaven we will not only have to live with God forever, but we will also have to live with each other. Sometimes we think of Heaven as a place for those who are good. If Heaven is a place whose only entrance requirement is to be good, then it will not be heavenly. There are plenty of good people who can get on our nerves. But if people are getting on our nerves, are we in Heaven? No. So, entering Heaven requires more than just being good. It means letting go of all selfishness. It means that we must be perfect.

The Lord Jesus taught us, "Be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect." He did not just say, "Be good." He did not say, "Be good enough." He taught us to be perfect. We will have to be perfect to enter Heaven. If we bring darkness into Heaven, then the perfect light of Heaven will be dimmed for ourselves and others. Then, is it really Heaven? We cannot take darkness into Heaven, so that is why it is important that we are rid of darkness before we enter Heaven.

Besides, Heaven is where God lives. Imagine that you are God, and you invite people to your home and instead of being gracious and respectful, they decide to take over and start making their own rules. No doubt that we would not like someone taking over our home. If we don't like the idea of that happening to our own homes, why would we want that to happen where God lives? The idea of getting to Heaven is not to bring our sinful habits there but to let go of them so that we can live there in peace.

That helps us to understand why it is so important that the Lord Jesus separates the good from the bad. We cannot take what is bad within us into Heaven. No doubt that God will help us to let go of what we need so that we can live there in peace. There are many things that God does to make sure that we are ready. But we too have our own part to play. We must be willing to allow God to purify us.

