

***InVent: Clear***  
November 17, 2013  
Rev. Dirk Damonte

Philippians 2:1-11

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This message probably should be called, *Of Car Commercials, Being the Church, and Batkid...or...What the Heck is Going on Here?*

Let's start with cars—

*Show Video*

Well, huh. Not sure what to say about that one. Of course, car donations are a good thing. I'm tempted to sing the "1-800-Kars for Kids" song for you. But, I'm not so sure about the motivation here.

Is the motivation for giving really the realization that what we have is inferior to what we want? Do we give only that which we've found to be not as good as what someone else has? Do we give away what we're embarrassed to own?

What's being cleared away here? And to make room for what?

hmmm...

Then there's being the church. Last Sunday, our Morning Glory choir traveled to First UMC Salinas to share in worship leadership, to bring some donations, and to continue our partnership and connection with that wonderful church and their inspiring ministry among the least of these. Several of our MoGlo members were surprised to hear, in Pastor Jim

Luther's sermon, that their church is the target of some local businesses who are urging the city to enforce zoning laws that will force the church to curtail many of its ministries. The Oldtown Salinas Association, which First United Methodist Church Salinas is a member of, called an emergency meeting, conveniently neglecting to notify Jim Luther or anyone from First United Methodist, where they drafted a complaint letter to be sent to the Salinas City Manager. The complaint, which listed "First Methodist Church" as the "Target"—their words, not mine—says, "This Association...demands that immediate code enforcement action be taken against the church. Action must require the church to cease and desist performance of any and all activities in violation of zoning code to include, but not limited to: •meal service, •providing 'drop in' space or services, •distribution of clothes, food or household items, •mobile health clinic." The complaint included as supporting exhibits, a copy of First United Methodist's webpage listing "community services," and many specific comments from local business owners detailing their grievances.

When Pastor Jim got wind of this, he reached out to the Association, as a dues-paying member, and initiated a dialog. And the complaint from the Association was retracted. Which inspired a number of businesses within the Association to file a complaint on their own. So the struggle continues.

What's being cleared away here? To make room for what?

Well, okay, what about Batkid? The feel good story of the week—heck, maybe the month, maybe more—was the story of 5-year-old leukemia survivor Miles Scott, who, through the efforts of Make-a-Wish Foundation and thousands of volunteers, lived out his batman dream as San Francisco was transformed into Gotham City on Friday. Miles, aka Batkid, saved a damsel in distress who was tied to the cable car tracks, rescued the San Francisco Giants mascot Lou Seal from the Penguin, and thwarted the Riddler as he tried to rob a bank. In the process he got the keys to the city and received a video message from President Obama.

Now, Miles by some accounts seemed pretty overwhelmed by the whole thing. But something about this touched the hearts of thousands and thousands of people, not just in San Francisco but all across the country. Heck, Nancy Pelosi and Ted Cruz tweeted positive tweets about it! Yes! Nancy Pelosi and Ted Cruz agreed about something! Batkid brought them together.

What's being cleared away here? To make room for what?

What is being cleared away? What needs to be cleared away?

To make room for what?

This series, *InVent*, is about preparing to prepare, so that when the season of Advent comes, as it always does, with the church culture telling us it's the season to prepare a place in our hearts for the coming of the Christ, and the secular/commercial culture telling us it's the season where Black Friday starts on Thanksgiving Thursday this year, and that's only for those of you who didn't finish your Christmas shopping by Halloween, when we open the Advent Door on December 1st, we have done some of the spiritual work that it takes to be ready. *InVent: Create, Clear, Commit*. We are using Paul's letter to the Philippians as our guide to our spiritual preparation for the season of preparation.

Philippians is a great letter. Paul wrote it from prison, and yet it is overflowing with hope and joy. Wesleyan scholars say that of all of Paul's letters, Philippians is the perhaps most Wesleyan, because, as the Wesley Study Bible says, it "best illustrate's Wesley's oft-repeated characterization of the Christian life as both happy and holy." Last week, the first chapter of Philippians helped us focus on what it means to create new ways and new spaces to live out the good work that God has begun and continues to do in each of us.

This week, we have this marvelous part of Paul's letter where he challenges us to "let the same mind be in [us] that was in Christ Jesus..." And he goes on to explain what that means. He says that even though Jesus was one with God, he didn't exploit that but rather "emptied himself...humbled himself...became obedient." Having the mind of Christ—other translations call it the "attitude of Christ"—is to empty ourselves. The Greek word for this is *kenosis*—it means the emptying of our will so that we can fully embrace God's will.

Emptying ourselves of our will, so that we can fully live in the fullness of God's will.

Wow.

That's the *clear* part of *InVent*. As Pastor Sam put it in his synopsis of this week's theme: This very Jesus we will come to understand once again in December is one who's journey into the world was wrapped in humility... who's cradle was among cows. There was no hype and no hoopla. Just the Savior-God completely emptied. We too need to experience this in our lives of faith – clearing and emptying ourselves and our lives of the clutter of this world and the ego-driven agendas of our hearts. Preparing for Advent, which is the season of preparing for the coming of the One who emptied himself, is in essence preparing and clearing the way.

We have acknowledged and recognized and embraced, once again, the wonder of God's creation, the creation that has happened and is happening and continues to happen within and through and all around us. The one who began a good work in us continues to work in us, and we create new ways and new spaces for that good work to bear fruit in us, and through us bear fruit in God's world. That's *create*.

And so if this God is constantly creating and re-creating us, if God began a good work in us and continues to create and perfect that good work in us, then what can we clear out of the way to make room for that creation to flourish?

What can we clear out of the way so that the season of preparation that is Advent can be a time of deep transformation, transcendence, and incarnation?

Paul is saying that what needs to be cleared out of the way is ourselves—our egos, our selfishness, our arrogance, our self-absorption, our self-righteousness. Earlier in this letter, Paul writes of those who “proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry...out of selfish ambition, not sincerely...” That can't happen if we allow the mind of Christ to guide us, a way of living and loving that is other-centered, humble, acutely tuned to the will of God, seeking to serve and sacrifice.

Advent is a season of living intentionally the practice of opening and preparing our hearts to make room for Jesus to enter our lives, maybe for the first time, maybe to come back in after we've shut him out, maybe to enter into our lives in deeper and more complete ways. During the season of Advent we will have some wonderful tools available to help us with that. We'll be using Rev. Jan Richardson's beautiful daily devotional book, *The*

*Advent Door*, as the basis for our sermon series, small group studies, and personal devotions. You can download the book on your ereader, or we'll print copies for those of you that want to purchase hard copies. We'll be engaging in the Advent Conspiracy as we spend less, give more, worship fully, and love all. If you haven't picked up your Advent Conspiracy envelope, they are available at the connection point as you leave. Yes, Advent is ready to engage us fully and lead us into places of deep connection and preparation.

It's up to us to do all we can to create, clear, and commit minds and spirits and lives that are ready for it.

Let's go back to cars, being the church, and batkid for a moment.

In the Audi commercial, everyone who fell under the spell of the slick new Audis driving by were immediately compelled to get rid of what they had thought was their luxury car, but now realized paled in comparison to the wonders they had seen.

The drive for bigger, better, sleeker, more luxurious, more beautiful, more... well, more more... motivates us to always be clearing things away, but only to be filled by more things. There is a void, something deep within that longs to be filled, and so often we think that the void can be filled by whatever's newer and cooler.

In Salinas, some members of the business community think that clearing away the least and lost, sweeping them and their unpleasantness out of sight and out of smell and out of mind will somehow make the community safe and prosperous again. Confronted with the disparities between the haves and the have nots, with the complexities of serving as the church in the community, these business leaders think that clearing it out of their field of vision is enough. There is a void there, too, something deep within that longs to be filled, and so often we think that turning our backs on our problems will make the void go away.

And batkid. Well, what does it tell us that thousands and thousands of people can come together to help make a brave little boy's dreams come true? I wonder if it tells us that here, too, is a void, something deep within that longs to be filled, and that by seeing a way that we can come together

and celebrate healing and a dream coming true, we fill that void, if only for a few hours on a Friday in November?

We all carry those voids. We try all sorts of things to fill them, whether it's shiny new things or turning our backs on the problems or joining together to do something good for someone.

But until we can empty ourselves, live into the kenosis of the mind of Christ, the heart of Christ, the way of Jesus, we will carry those voids around and exhaust ourselves trying to fill them.

See? That's the sacred irony of *InVent*. We fill the emptiness by emptying ourselves. We embrace the mystery, we prepare ourselves to prepare.

And so, let us clear the way, and the way will be made clear; let us prepare our hearts, and our hearts can prepare; let us empty ourselves, and we will be filled.

Amen