

December 20, 2015
Micah 5:2-5a

Advent 4C
The King's Royal Roots: Back to the Future

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Advent King. Amen.

There's something about going back to one's roots that can re-establish one's sense of identity. Sometimes we lose our way, and it can happen so slowly and incrementally that we don't even realize what's happening, like getting lost in the woods or turned around in a big city, and suddenly we *realize* we don't *recognize* where we are and where we are going. And what do we do? Retrace our steps, get back to familiar landmarks, and we find our way home.

We can get lost in life, too. We have plans, even strategies for achieving them. We have values and priorities. We have a sense of who we are, who we want to be, what we want to do. And then life happens!

Sometimes we proceed on track, following our life's map, as it were. Often we get off track, because, well, life happens, and things pull us this way and that. And we can find ourselves pretty far away from the course we had set.

This can happen to our spiritual lives, too. We receive baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ as infants or later in life, but in either case totally dependent on God's grace, his action in Christ, for us. And then we start to think God needs our help; we value our spiritual life on what we have done instead of what God has done for us.

We take our confirmation vows to remain faithful, even unto death. And then comes high school, college, and well, life happens, ya know. Instead of focusing on the promises we made and our faith, we view it as a graduation of sorts. Perhaps even I've confessed my faith. I'm saved, now, I can do what I want and that includes doing everything else except hearing God's Word and receiving the Lord's Supper faithfully.

This can even happen to the church corporate. Frankly, it is what happened at the time of Luther—the whole Reformation was really a course correction for a church that had, over time, drifted away from the basic truths that became the great themes of the Reformation: grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone, Christ alone!

It can even happen to a church body. Sometimes it can seem we major in minors, or emphasize truth and doctrine for its own sake and not for the sake of the mission of the church. Or we can chase any which way to do mission but start to lose our theological mooring, our identity as Lutheran Christians. And then we focus so much on who we are than we forget what we are to be—and to be about—in the mission of Christ.

It can happen to a congregation. Like the old story of the rescue station that becomes a club for members; a congregation can drift from its mission and central message as the body of Christ in this places for all those around it. We can become an insiders club

which then turns into a place where we forget about those in our community who need to hear the message of Jesus.

And so we have to recalibrate the GPS-in our lives, as a congregation, as the church, as the Kingdom of God. This is really what happened in the time of Micah, the prophet of our text. As we have heard Sunday after Sunday during our Advent Journey, the people of God had lost their way. The kings of the house and lineage of David acts as though they were real kings, not the servants of God for the kingdom of God. The people had become more interested in themselves, in their own success, and not in serving God and their neighbor.

And the prophets had some hard words, as we have heard before. Of the great citadel Jerusalem and its temple, Micah said, "Zion will be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins."

Yet their message was not without hope. They spoke of a new king, another son of David. But there was also a sense that the new king was not just another David, as though maybe just one more generation was needed to get it all back on track. No, this was not just about going forward, this was a message of going back, remembering where they came from, and getting back on course.

For the king, this meant remembering David and his humble beginnings, back in his hometown of Bethlehem. This wasn't "David's Royal City" then. It was a small rural town, and Jesse and his sons were shepherds. Remember that Samuel looked for a son to anoint as king, and they brought past him all the sons but David – he was the youngest and was out in the fields doing his work. He wasn't even under consideration, but he was the one.

Of course, when he became king, David himself quickly outgrew his humility. It didn't take long for the house of David to get off course. And God would have to find them, having lost their way, and get them back. Back to the beginning. Back to Bethlehem.

Back to a new birth of a new king.

Dear fellow Saints of God, fellow members of the Kingdom of God,

We started our Advent journey toward understanding God's king and his kingdom by talking about "home," the place, the city that is the king's capital and that identifies his kingdom. We talked about the importance of a place called home, with its safe and security. But we also noted that even the king of the kingdom of God could confused his ideas about the kingdom with what God really wanted and intended it to be.

And so would be born one who would be ruler in Israel (It's quite interesting that Micah doesn't call him "king".) His origins, and his "goings forth" (that is to say, where he came from and where he was going) was part of God's everlasting plan to send a Savior and save the world, save the church, save you and me, from our irresistible

tendency and temptation to get ourselves lost, to get off course, to wander from God's plan and then even wonder if we still are God's people.

In our text today, on this last Sunday of Advent, now just a matter of days from Christmas itself, God calls us to consider not just our home, as we did when started this journey, but our roots—not where we live, or lived, but where we were born; where we started; where our family comes from.

We think immediately of our family home, but in our spiritual lives, I would remind us to consider where and when we were born into the family of God. For me it was in a 1900 church building on the corner of 8th Avenue and Lincoln St. in Antigo, WI, by Pastor Randall Neal on Oct. 30, 1983. For many of you, that was right here, at this baptismal font. For others of you, like me, it was in other churches and places, but again, in the waters of Holy Baptism, which is the same power of God unto salvation wherever and whenever it comes to his people.

And as we prepare to celebrate our Savior's birth once more, we recall that little town of Bethlehem, not for the sentimental scenes we might find on Christmas Cards but for the holy history that it conveys: this was the birthplace, if you will, of the kingdom of God.

And as we prepare for Christmas, we remember how God himself went back to the beginning, back to the basics, back to Bethlehem. And this time the son of David got it right. No losing his way. No selfish self-interests. This son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom.

Yet He was a king, a true and greater king than any ruler of Israel or president of the greatest democracy on earth. An angel choir announced His birth – not to the people of power in high places but to shepherds, out in the field, doing their job like David was doing back in the day, just outside of the Little town of Bethlehem.

He was God's true King: David's son, but also David's Lord. He would come to His capital city in royal procession and be crowned with a crown of thorns. HE would take upon himself the sin and suffering for all, to bear our sin and be our Savior, securing God's forgiveness for all our own sin and self-interest. And he would be raised again, ascended to his heavenly throne, where he lives and *reigns* to all eternity, for us and for our salvation.

Yes, there will be peace, even on earth, not just for the house of Israel, but to the very ends of the Earth!

As our Advent Season draws to a close, and we draw nearer to the manger itself, our preparation turns, too, back to the beginning, back to the basics, "*ad fontes*" as the Latin saying goes, back to the front, back to the baptismal font, back to the baptismal waters where it all started for you and me. There we received our new life. There the Christmas message became a lasting truth for our lives. There we became God's

people, forgiven, to live under HIM in HIS KINGDOM, and to serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness!

O morning stars, together they proclaim the holy birth –
And praises sing to God, the King!—and peace to all the earth!

Amen!

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.