

Sermon  
Advent 3-C  
St. Andrew's, Methuen  
December 12, 2021  
William Bradbury

Zephaniah 3:14-20  
Philippians 4:4-7  
Luke 3:7-18  
Canticle 9

Blaise Pascal was a French mathematician of the first rank, creating one of the first mechanical calculators. He was also a physicist and religious philosopher. He died of stomach cancer in 1662 at the age of 38, but 8 years before his death Pascal had a profound mystical experience that changed his life: He wrote a 237-word account of this experience on parchment and sewed it into the lining of his coat. It was discovered after his death.

It reads in part: "In the year of grace, 1654, on Monday, 23rd of November...From about half past ten in the evening until about half past twelve. FIRE. GOD of Abraham, GOD of Isaac, GOD of Jacob not of the philosophers and of the learned. Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace. GOD of Jesus Christ. My God and your God. Your GOD will be my God. Forgetfulness of the world and of everything, except GOD....

God of Jesus Christ.... Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy...."

Who is the God of the philosophers that Pascal rejects?

**This is the god thought up by human reason that imagines we are competent to imagine god.** The Deists, among them some of our founding fathers and mothers, for example, imagine god as a watchmaker who constructs the world, winds it up, and throws it out into space where it runs undisturbed, while god sits off in eternal distance unmoved by what happens here on earth.

**This god of the Enlightenment could never show up in a French home one evening and transform a life.**

The God that shows up that night for Pascal is the God who lures Moses over to the burning bush and says: "I have heard the cries of my people suffering under the cruelty of their Egyptian taskmasters. And I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them to a rich and wide land, flowing with milk and honey."

This God loves creation like a mother who hears the cry of her children and expresses outrage at their suffering.

For many Christians their faith is a lukewarm affair between “me and God” and has nothing to do with understanding the suffering of others. They’re happy, for example, to remember the good old days while forgetting its racist underbelly.

A priest friend of mine posted on Facebook that iconic photograph of 6-year-old Ruby Bridges with her maroon dress, white sweater, and patten leather shoes being escorted by federal marshals to her all-white school in New Orleans in 1960.

Above the picture it reads: **“If this child is strong enough to survive it, your child is strong enough to learn about it.”**

Those listening to John the baptizer, however, want to know how they can participate in what God is doing to set things right against all the violence and escapism.

So they ask, “Teacher, what should we do?”

John says: “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none.”

To the tax guys he says, “Don’t fleece the people to fatten your own wallet.” To the soldiers working for King Herod he says, “No blackmail, no prejudice, no cover-up, be satisfied with your pay.”

### **John, like all the prophets, shares in God’s outrage at injustice.**

Author and priest Fleming Rutledge asks: But where’s the outrage in the church today?

She asks: “Why has the gap between rich and poor become so huge? Why are so many mentally ill people slipping through the crack? Why does gun violence continue to be a hallmark of American culture? Why are so many innocent people put on death row? Why are our prisons filled with such a preponderance of black and Hispanic men? **Where’s the outrage?** The public is outraged all over cyberspace about all kinds of things that annoy us personally...**but outrages in the heart of God go unnoticed and unaddressed.**” Ibid 129

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As I've mentioned before, in 1987 Franciscan Friar Richard Rohr founded the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico, because he was tired of spiritual communities that just got fat maintaining their own comfort. This center would be about real action for social justice in the world—they would be radical givers.

They regularly went to Kirkland, just outside Albuquerque, to a laboratory where the atomic bomb was invented and hold up posters presenting questions of faith. See Rohr's *Simplicity: The Freedom of Letting Go*, p.47.

They worked with impoverished Native Americans and other groups to heal their hurts.

For the Community of Action and Contemplation action was the most important word.

**But then they realized that they had gotten out of balance.**

Some people were coming to do social action ministry who had not really found the peace of Christ in their hearts. They might be working for peace in the world but their hearts were full of anger and fear which meant they were polluting the environment with negativity and thus causing more pain and suffering and less peace.

**So the leaders began working hard to train people in the peace of Christ through Centering Prayer and being present with love in the Eternal Now.** Teaching men, especially, to get out of their heads and into their hearts, so they could share the love of Christ and not just their adolescent anger. So, then, contemplation became the most important word.

But as you know Rohr now says the most important word in the title of their community is the word **"and"**—contemplation **and** action. Action **and** contemplation.

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I know parishes in our diocese that offer lots of ways of getting involved in social action, but have no programs on Centering Prayer or Christian Meditation.

**But Pascal is right when he says, "All our miseries derive from not being able to sit quiet in a room alone."**

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Apostle Paul tells us today: **"The Lord is near", not lost in space,** therefore he says, "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

Then he says, "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Today is a good day to ask the Spirit and Fire of Christ to blow through St. Andrew's Church and each of our hearts:

**Then, we will know what we should do.**

