

Sermon Response Guide: December 3, 2023
Zechariah's Song of Hope: Luke 1:68-79
Pastor Phil Rushton

Sermon Overview:

Last week we reflected on the idea that we are directed by what we love. Our longings and desires shape what we live for. If we love money, we will pour ourselves into earning as much as we can. If we love recognition we will work hard to gain the affirmation of others. If we love God, we will pour our lives into growing in our faith. The Jesuit priest Pedro Arrupe captures this idea well in one of my favorite quotes, which I have shared before. He writes,

Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in Love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.

My hope for this advent series is that we would experience a reorientation of what we love. To facilitate this reorientation, we are immersing ourselves in a repertoire of music that teaches us to long for God. Whereas our culture immerses us in songs and narratives that lead us into the worship of mammon, the songs we encounter in Luke 1-2, awaken our heart to the hope of what Christ has come to accomplish among us. They teach us to fall in love and stay in love with God.

Our song today comes from a man named Zechariah. Zechariah also needs to experience a reorientation of his hopes and longings. When we first encounter Zechariah in Luke chapter 1, we find a man who has lost hope. Zechariah is a priest who is serving in the temple. What I find somewhat comical as well as convicting, is that Zechariah is completely caught up guard when God shows up at church! In Luke 1:11-12 we read, "Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear." Later, after the angel announces that his wife, who is well along in years, will give birth to a great prophet named John he says, How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

We see a man who has lost hope—a priest who isn't so sure about God anymore. Zechariah no longer expects God to show up during worship. Somehow, though, Zechariah experiences a turning point. In our text today, he sings a song full of hope.

One of the interesting parts of Zechariah's story is that the angel takes away his capacity to speak. For nine months he enters a long season of silence. I wonder if this silence creates the context by which Zechariah is able to hear from God. I wonder if silence allows enough space for God to speak.

Our text also points out that the song of Zechariah is inspired by the Holy Spirit. This is significant. It reminds us that we need the help of the Spirit of God to hear and see God correctly. If we are struggling to understand God, see God, or desire God, we can call upon the Spirit to help us. Recall the great promise that Paul articulates in Romans 8:26, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."

Emerging from the silence and filled with the Holy Spirit, Zechariah erupts in a litany of praise. In the sermon this week we notice four sources of hope that Zechariah discovers.

1. Zechariah celebrates God's presence
2. Zechariah celebrates God's strength
3. Zechariah celebrates God's faithfulness
4. Zechariah Celebrates God's guidance

Questions for Reflection:

1. What stood out to you in the sermon / text today?
2. Can you resonate with Zechariah's surprise and skepticism when the angel first brings him a word of hope? If so, what is behind your hesitancy to hope?
3. What voices, distractions, or influences might need to be silenced in your life so that you can hear God more clearly?
4. Of the things Zechariah celebrates about the coming of Christ in this song (presence, strength, faithfulness, guidance,) what are you most grateful for today?
5. If you were to write a song of praise to God, what would you praise him for today?