

The Wonderful Counselor
Isaiah 9:2-7, John 16:5-15

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is a season of hope, of expectation and of waiting for the coming of the Prince of Peace, Christ our Lord. Today we can hear and are introduced to the Prince of Peace by Isaiah. Isaiah introduces the Messiah as Wonderful Counselor. The Wonderful Counselor should be hyphenated. Let us again open our heart and accept the Lord Jesus as our Saviour.

One day Eve had been waiting all day long for Adam whom had gone hunting. As he returned dragging a deer from the hunt, Eve asked Adam, complaining of his being late,

“Do you love me?”

“Who else?” Adam replied to her.

There was no relational problem at all between Adam and Eve since there was nobody other than themselves. However, after Adam and Eve had their two sons, their family's harmony broke down. Their son, Cain, hated and attacked and murdered his own brother, Abel, because Cain was jealous of Abel.

Our greatest joys and our greatest sorrows so often come through human relationships. When things are right in our human relationships there is a sense of well-being and of fulfillment. When things are wrong in our human relationships there is frustration, emptiness, and loneliness.

Becoming a society is dangerous and makes life more complicated. But it is not strange that it should be so. By nature we are social creatures. We come into being, we are sustained, we are nurtured and we are spiritually formed through relationships.

A Sunday School Christmas program in a certain church was delayed because just as the participants were about to enter, a quarrel broke out among some of the eight-year-old angels! Yes, Christmas comes with its message of peace and goodwill, but it comes to a world in which we have great problems with our human relationships through life.

Last week I heard that an eighteen years old young lady committed suicide in the Laramie Community College dormitory. It was sad and frightening news, even to those who didn't know her. It must have been such a shock to her family and friends and those who knew her well. We can't but wonder if there was something that might have helped her. If she could have had a real counselor or friend to talk and share her troubles with, honestly, perhaps she would not have decided to committed suicide.

Helen Keller once said that if a person has faith and friends he can stand anything. Most of us know from experience how precious friendship is. To have someone who knows us and who cares about us is to be truly blessed.

Some years ago, a young college student, Dottie, came to see her pastor. She was greatly distressed. Her whole world was mixed up, and she was depressed and disillusioned. She said:

Pastor, I'm a real loser! Everything in my life is in such turmoil now. My grades are down; I can't seem to get my mind on my studies. I'm having financial problems. I can't get along with my parents. We aren't communicating at all. I can't find a job for this summer. I don't have a boyfriend... I don't see any hope for me anywhere. I feel confused, rejected, lonely, cut off. I feel like a misfit.

After talking a bit longer, the pastor prayed together with the student. Then as she was about to leave, the pastor said to her:

Dottie, I'm not very good at giving advice, but I would like to make one suggestion. Why don't you go home and sit down with your parents and have this conversation with them? Tell them your story. Tell them what's bothering you. Don't yell or scream or run out of the room. Just talk to them like you have been talking to me... person to person... adult to adult... and ask them to help you.

Dottie wasn't excited about doing that, but she promised him she would try.

A week or so later, Dottie came bursting into her pastor's office. She was radiant, beautiful, bubbling over with excitement as she exclaimed:

Pastor, you won't believe what all has happened. Everything is going great now! My world has turned around. My parents were terrific. I never knew they could be so understanding and helpful. They listened - they really listened to me! Dad has helped me find summer work. Both of them have been so concerned... and can you believe it? I'm dating the neatest guy who just transferred in from another state!

Everybody is looking for a counselor for help. But no counselor can give us everything we need for today's life. That is the problem. Today's message from the scripture is that God sent the wonderful counselor, Jesus Christ, to provide excellent advice to the subjects that we need the most to address, even today.

Counseling is not an easy task. Not long ago, the pastor of a church in the eastern United States wrote a provocative article which he titled "Counseling is a waste of time." Frustrated with his lack of counseling success, the writer

complained of spending hours upon hours... talking ad infinitum with scores of persons who simply do not follow through on his pastoral advice.

I had been counseling for a long time among my parishioners when I finally concluded that I'm not a good counselor. It's better to be a good referrer than to be a good counselor. After that, I have been happy to become a referrer. Referring the clients to the wonderful counselor, the Lord Jesus Christ, is my job.

The human race is in constant search for someone who we can trust and share our hidden heart. The Bible tells us "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the Multitude of counselors there is safety." (Prov. 11: 14).

A biblically oriented pastor arrived at his parishioner's house for a surprise visit after they hadn't been church. It was in the hot summer, around noon, when the pastor rang the door bell. As no responded from the inside, he rang the bell again. Still, there was no answer. He sensed that definitely someone was inside, and heard the sound of a television from within. So the pastor took out his business card and wrote a very brief message. He wrote Revelation 3:20. It said, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

The next Sunday the lady whom the pastor visited put a note on the pastor's office door and it said. Genesis 3:10. "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

Like this story, everybody bears his or her own guilt and shame in that secret place in the heart where no one is allowed to get into.

To receive counseling from a counselor, a covenant agreement of intimacy and close relationship are needed. If a counselee has a conscious or unconscious desire to manipulate the relationship, or does not cooperate with the counselor in the counseling work, the counseling is not effective. This counselor-counselee relationship is very important.

Jesus shows us how this relationship is important and how our relationship with him will be.

"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

Paul said, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? ...If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple." (I Cor.3:16-17)

We live in a society of alienation, of despair, and of competition. So we seek throughout life to be comforted from all that which assails us.

Everybody is lonely in some sense. We are lonely because we all have problems relating to others, at one time or another. Sometime, today's a good friend becomes an enemy tomorrow. We live in a culture of competition and violence. There are many victims of this culture.

It appears that we are living in a society of freedom and equality. But, our hearts are not free, but rather stressed by competition and hardened by apathy.

Apathy is the problem of communication. Apathy means quitting on life. It is the opposite of faith. It is the opposite of hope. It is the opposite of love. It is the opposite of commitment. To be apathetic is to be spiritless, heartless, and sluggish. It is to be numb, paralyzed, in-sensitive. To be apathetic is to be unconcerned, unimpressed, unexcited, unmoved, unstirred, untouched.

We find ourselves, at times, living in despair. It may seem that there are many failures, compared to only a few successes. Competition makes a friend an enemy, peace war, contentment discontentment, a night of sleep a night of sleeplessness, a neighbor a watcher, and takes out our hope, leaving despair in life.

Christ is offered to us to transform despair to hope. God's ultimate word to man is not a word of condemnation and despair, but a word of grace and hope. Competition is the enemy we should conquer.

Do you know Oscar Wilde's famous story that depicts the devil crossing the Libyan Desert? The devil comes upon a group of people who are tormenting a holy man. They are trying to tempt him and break his spirit, but to no avail. They can't touch him. They can't upset him. They can't ruffle him. He resists every temptation with a great spirit of peace, poise, and serenity. They tempt him with all sorts of worldly pleasures, but the holy man is steadfast, unbending in his commitment.

Finally, after watching the tempters for a while, the devil whispers to them, "Your methods are too crude, too obvious. Permit me one moment." Then the devil walks over and whispers to the holy man, "Have you heard the news? Your brother has just been made Bishop of Alexandria!" Immediately, a malignant scowl of jealousy clouds the formerly serene face of the holy man.

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light, on them has "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Cor. 4:6) flashed out.

Jesus is the wonderful counselor.

The Gospel of John is telling us that His going to God is good for us and He will send the Counselor to us. The Holy Spirit, He will send is to empower us and to continue the Lord's counseling work among us.

It is time to make in our soul a humble room for new hope of the baby Jesus to be born. During this Advent season, we prepare the way for Jesus in our hearts to that He can be reborn in our soul and so that He is in us and we are in Him. He is the Wonderful Counselor who can carry our burdens of loneliness, worry, despair and fill us with comfort, hope and peace.