

Pastor Roy's Sermon from Dec. 21, 2014 (4th Sunday of Advent)

I have very fond childhood memories of playing outdoor and indoor neighborhood games. Since I was one of the younger kids, I never really wanted to be it. But it was fun to play with the big kids either way. We used the potato method for choosing "it." Everybody put their potatoes in. Double elimination—last person with a potato in was it. Or if we were in a hurry, single potato elimination. One potato, two potato, three potato, four, five potato, six potato, 7 potato or. Or Eenie, menie, minie, moe, catch a tiger by the toe, if he hollers, let him go, eenie, menie, minie, moe. My mother told your mother to pick the very best one, and you are not it. Thirty one potato bumps according to my memory. Thirty five words. Consistency was vital for equal treatment. Being "it" was important, but you never had the option of not being "it" if you were chosen. If you wanted to play, you had to be willing to be "it."

If you follow with my "it" theme, David was chosen to be the king. He was "it." Then, David volunteers to build God a temple. Nathan the prophet thinks, well, it's about time we give a place of honor to Yahweh here in this kingdom. David says, "Let me be 'it!'" Nathan says, "Yes, David, you are 'it!'" He probably thought as he headed home, "I love being a prophet for a good king!" But overnight he learns that Yahweh does not share his excitement with being included in the rush to build up Jerusalem. "I do not need a house to stay in. I will not be contained. I do not wish to have a temple to take the place of my Spirit which freely moves throughout Israel." In other words, God tells David, "You are not "it" when it comes to building a temple." You did not choose me, I have chosen you. I will make for you a house. Your throne is established forever."

Nathan is fortunate to learn that he can say "no" to the king. David is fortunate to learn that he can accept not being "it." He will learn this again in but a few chapters. He will be told "No," to adultery and a cover up murder. That kind of behavior is not "it" for the king in Israel. There *are* limits. That was a new concept in the Ancient Near East. Kings were accustomed to calling the shots, making the decisions, being in charge, building temples, being "it."

Nathan reminds David what he has learned, listening to Yahweh. You are not "it," but your throne will continue. Finally, I, Yahweh, King of the Universe, am "It." And your royal line of chosen shepherd kings will go on for all time because a shepherd king is the way to be king. Greatness is based on humility, mercy, and willingness to follow Yahweh.

According Israel's historical books and the prophets, David's flawed shepherd kingship is much more inspiring, sustainable, and authentic than pretty much all of the other kings regardless of their many demonstrations of royal power. David was not "it" as a temple builder, but he certainly was "it" as king. Every king in Israel's history is judged according to David's openness to Yahweh and whether they measured up. Only a few pass the test. This is why in the time of Jesus, Israel is still dreaming of a king from the royal line of David.

Gabriel speaks with Mary. "You will conceive, bear a son, and name him Jesus. You, Mary, are 'it.'" Mary responds, "No, I cannot be 'it.'" It's not possible for me to bear this heir to the throne of David. Gabriel speaks, "Look, Mary, you don't decide who is 'it,' God does. And nothing will be impossible with God.

Perhaps David and Mary are chosen because, like Israel, they were unlikely. They were not among the powerful, the wealthy, the brilliantly gifted in history. They are common. They are

humble. They are willing to go along with God's suggestion. Mary says, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word." The angel departs, and it is quiet. Very Quiet. Then comes the difficult part. To say "Yes," is easy. To *live* "Yes," is very difficult--as David and Mary learned. Very difficult, indeed.

When have *you* heard God say, "You're it!?" What impossible task has God invited you to undertake? To what have you been called even though it feels there is no way that you will succeed? This is not as much a matter of completing tasks, but of relationships, and lifelong tasks which require us to cooperate with others who struggle as much as we do.

David and Mary were chosen. They were "it." You and I are "it." In this season of waiting, of hope and joy, may we hear the Spirit of Christ calling us and may we, like David and Mary, courageously follow that Spirit of grace so that we may know peace. Amen.