

**First Presbyterian Church
Gal. 4.4-7, Worship Fully
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 11/27/2022**

For our sermons this Advent I'm going to revisit a set of themes and sermons that we looked at back in 2016 called the Advent Conspiracy.

These themes have been shared in thousands of churches and they offer practical ways to engage with the Christmas season that connect with the things that Jesus is really about.

As you know, every good conspiracy needs to have a scandalous statement at the heart of it. Here's one for the Advent Conspiracy:

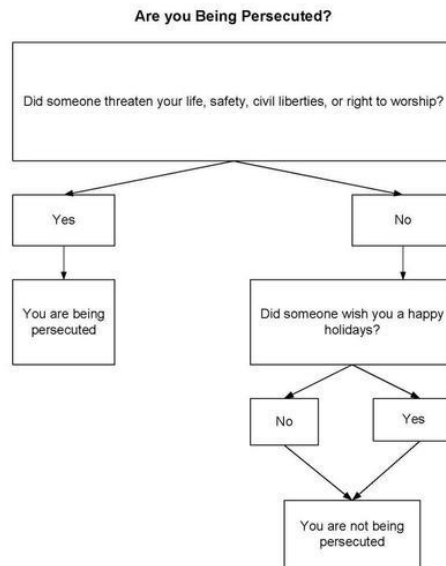
“The Christmas season is about the birth of Jesus Christ and how we live in light of it.”
How's that for rocking the boat?

Christmas is about focusing on the birth of Jesus Christ...not too scandalous?

Well, it's not scandalous at church on the first Sunday of Advent, of course.
But I think it is a scandalous idea in light of how the world sees Christmas.

We just made it through Black Friday,
which is really the whole month of November at this point.
This is a big deal in our country. It's a big deal because we take Christmas seriously ... if by seriously you mean buying stuff, eating stuff, and making stuff look pretty.

But as a society, we don't really take the birth of Jesus all that seriously.
Now, just because I'm acknowledging this, it doesn't mean that I think we're being persecuted for our beliefs as Christians.



Rachel Held Evans flow chart:

Nevertheless, apart from persecution, there is a real danger
 that we can be drawn into the idolatries of our age through overconsumption,
 worrying what people will think of us if we do/don't give this or that,
 worrying about having enough money to buy
 all that we feel expected to buy, etc.

We all have to navigate these things at some level, and it's not a lot of fun.

We often buy things that our friends and family either don't need,
 or actually don't even want, and which have no intrinsic value.

Think about the gifts you got for Christmas last year...
 can you even remember them?

If you can remember the best gift you got, can you remember the 3rd best gift?

How many gifts made a significant impact on your life or other's lives?

Some gifts do, but many gifts do not.

The National Retail Federation estimates that holiday retail sales
 during November and December will grow between 6% and 8%
 over 2021 to between \$942.6 billion and \$960.4 billion.

That's almost a TRILLION DOLLARS on Christmas stuff.

Even so, 73% of the purchases were not what the person really wanted.

(I made that last one up.)

What if we spent less money on insignificant things for our friends and family,
and gave more to those who Jesus spent his time caring for?

What if...we spent a portion of that money (and time and energy)
on things that truly transform people's lives?

What if we actually served the most vulnerable...
the least of these?

This is what the idea of the Advent Conspiracy is all about:

Choosing not to serve ourselves with insignificant and transient gifts,
but rather to serve others in truly meaningful ways.

It's a national effort that thousands of churches participate in
across many denominations.

Advent Conspiracy has four key components to help us enter into this vision:

- 1) Worship Fully
- 2) Spend Less
- 3) Give More
- 4) Love All

Today we are going to look at the first of these: Worship Fully

Celebrating Christmas and serving others begins with Worshipping God Fully!

Now...what does that mean?

“Worshipping God Fully” means we reject a fractured experience of life with God.

When life gets busy and the to-do list stacks up, and our energy levels
are worn down day by day, it can feel like we don't have time for God.

We simply don't have space for another thing on the list,
and so a worshipful connection with God
just has to wait for another time.

I've had that thought go through my head many times as a pastor.

But I really believe that mentality is what leads us down the path to being
consumed by our consumption-oriented society.

In worshipping fully, we don't strive for a singular experience in God's presence.
Instead, we seek out connection with God
broadly throughout our days and weeks.

This means that worshipping fully is not another item on the to-do list,
it's turning the to-do list into an opportunity to worship. [REPEAT]

You see, God calls us to worship with everything we have:
Our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

This means our whole self all the time. But that's not a burden, it's a grace.
It's a grace that we see explored in the passage we read earlier from
Galatians 4.

In this passage, Paul is talking to the church in Galatia
about the relationship between
God's Law, God's Promises, and God's Children.

And he says that God's law is good.
But functionally God's children became like slaves to the law.
In the ancient world, slaves were part of the household
but they were not really part of the family.

If God's children had become like slaves to the law, what was the solution?
God's promise to make all of God's children truly, permanently, family.

The fulfillment of this promise is described in verse 4:
**“When the time had fully come, God sent his Son born of a woman,
born under the law, to redeem those under the law,
[so that instead of being like slaves!]
that we might receive adoption to sonship.”**

There are two things I want us to see in this passage:
First is the phrase, “When the time had fully come.”

This does not mean God had an alarm clock that went off.
It's not calendar time. It refers to the most opportune moment.
It's the time that a hunter senses after waiting for just the right shot.
It's the time that a parent or teacher realizes when
a lesson can be taught that will last a lifetime.
It's the time when you discern that a friend truly
needs your help.

God sent Jesus to grow and develop in Mary's womb at just the right moment,
when the world was ready to encounter God in the flesh.

Why did Jesus come? To restore the relationship between Creator and creation.

A lot of people feel guilty during Christmas. I didn't decorate well enough.

I didn't figure out what everyone wanted soon enough.

I didn't make the right food.

I didn't go to all the parties and smile all the smiles
that people asked me to.

I didn't get the Christmas cards out on time (or ... like us ... at all).

Friends, that is slavery to the law.

If you feel disconnected from Christmas because of anything like that,
can I just tell you that when the time had fully come,

God sent a core family member—a son—to be like you
and to bring you back with him
into the core of God's family.

That's the mission of Jesus.

What is the result? We receive adoption to sonship.

It's worth noting why the passage says "sonship" here,

rather than the more egalitarian "adoption as God's child."

Adoption to sonship was a technical

Roman status indicating full legal claim to an inheritance.

When the time had fully come, God sent someone to bring us fully into the family,
with the right to inherit God's kingdom.

When we realize that truth, we worship fully.

The result of God's promise is that we worship fully.

We see this in v. 6, where Paul writes

**"God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts,
the Spirit who calls out "Abba, Father."**

Now, why would that be what the Spirit sent into our hearts calls out?

Why call out, "Abba? ... which is the Aramaic word for 'Daddy'?"

Because we are fully God's children again.

We're not slaves, or outsiders. We're fully included children,

who can call the Creator of all things, "Daddy." (Or "Mama.")

When the Spirit of God in our hearts calls out “Abba, Father,”
we are worshipping.

This is worship in the fullest sense – because it’s not worship that depends upon
our schedule being free. Our to-do list need not interrupt this worship.

It’s not based on our personal efforts or singing quality
or even how nice we’ve been to people...
it’s worship that depends on
the gift of God’s Spirit crying out
from within in our hearts.

What happened at Christmas is that the time had fully come
for God to draw us fully into God’s family,
so that we could fully worship through the Spirit
instead of being bound to the Law. Isn’t that incredible?

Understanding this is essential for this concept of Advent Conspiracy.

The foundation is all about grace.

Worshipping fully isn’t a burden, it’s a gift.

God gives us what we need to worship,
and in worshipping we echo back to God
what God has already given us.

A life full of worship is not just song singing and church attending,
but encountering and responding to God’s gracious presence in the world.
All of the world. And in all of your life.

Only out of a life full of worship can we spend less, give more,
and love all without being dragged from grace and freedom back into duty.

Only out of a life full of worship can we join God
in these ways and be changed as a result.

Only out of a life full of worship can we spend less
on presents and not feel like we’re being a Grinch
(or maybe more importantly, not become defensive
when someone accuses us of being a Grinch!)

So what do you think? Are you willing to be a co-conspirator?

Are you willing to take some practical steps
to worship less at the altars of commerce?
Are you ready to worship fully through the Spirit
that cries out to God from within you?

If you ask me, that would be a Christmas worth celebrating,
that would be a Christmas worth singing about,
that would be a Christmas worth inviting someone else into.

This conspiracy works best when you have friends and family joining you in it.
So if God's Spirit has called out from within you today,
let that worship spill out into a conversation
with someone else so that they can help you realize
this vision together.