

**FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS 12-27-20**

**ISIAH 61:10; 62:3; PSALM 147; GALATIANS 3:23-25; 4:4-7;**

**JOHN 1:1-18**

**GOOD MORNING**

**IN PAST YEARS WE USUALLY HAVE OUR LESSONS AND CAROLS ON THIS DAY. THIS SUNDAY IS ALSO KNOWN IN SOME PARTS OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION AS “LOW SUNDAY” OR “BOXING SUNDAY” BUT WHATEVER IT IS CALLED, WE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER SPIRITUALLY THIS YEAR IN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS FOR A VERY DIFFERENT HOLIDAY SEASON. FOR MOST OF US, IT WAS QUIET AND HUMBLING AND FOR ME THIS YEAR, REALLY EMPHAZIED THE REAL CELEBRATION OF CHRIST’S BIRTH.**

**PROPHESIS IN ISIAH 61 LOOK FORWARD TO JESUS, JOHN TALKS ABOUT HIM INDIRECTLY. WE SHOULD ALWAYS BE POINTING AT JESUS. BOTH OUR READINGS TODAY HAVE THAT SENSE OF LOOKING AHEAD, BUT THEY ARE NOT NECESSARILY LOOKING AT THE SAME THINGS.**

**LET’S LOOK AT ISIAH FIRST. THE ISRAELITES HAVE BEEN THROUGH A LOT. THEY HAVE BEEN DEFEATED AND EXILED**

FROM THEIR COUNTRY. EVENTUALLY, 70 YEARS LATER THEY ARE ALLOWED BACK. CHAPTERS 60 AND 61 LOOK FORWARD TO A BETTER FUTURE NOW THAT THEY HAVE REPENTED OF THEIR SINS. ONCE AGAIN THEY CAN TAKE THEIR PLACE AS FIRSTBORN AMONG THE NATIONS. ONCE AGAIN THEY CAN BECOME PRIESTS TO THE WORLD, AND TO BE A BLESSING TO ALL NATIONS. ALL THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD WILL SEE THIS AND ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THEY ARE A PEOPLE THAT THE LORD HAS BLESSED.

WHILE THE ISAIAH READING LOOKS FORWARD TO THE DISTANT FUTURE AND THE FAR DISTANT FUTURE, POINTING TO JESUS, THE MESSIAH, AND EVENTS THAT HAVE NOT HAPPENED EVEN IN OUR TIME, THE READING FROM JOHN LOOKS TO THE VERY IMMEDIATE FUTURE.

JOHN, JESUS' COUSIN, WAS SENT BY GOD TO IDENTIFY JESUS TO THE PEOPLE. HE IS BY ANY STANDARD A VERY STRANGE MAN. HE LIVES IN THE DESERT, WEARS CAMEL HAIR CLOTHES AND EATS LOCUSTS AND WILD HONEY. (COLLECTING THAT MUST HAVE HAD ITS' DANGERS!) HE STARTS A MINISTRY OF BAPTISM FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF

SINS. NOW YOU MIGHT THINK THAT SOMEONE WHO LIVES IN SUCH A STRANGE WAY, AND BEGINS A NEW RELIGIOUS CEREMONY MIGHT BE SHUNNED BY MOST OF THE POPULATION. BUT THIS IS NOT THE CASE FOR JOHN, MANY PEOPLE ARE COMING TO HEAR HIM AND TO RECEIVE HIS BAPTISM IN THE JORDAN RIVER. TOO MANY, IN FACT, FOR THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF THE DAY. THEY WANT TO KNOW WHAT HE'S UP TO, AND PROBABLY MORE SPECIFICALLY, WHETHER HE IS A THREAT TO THE ESTABLISHED ORDER.

SO A DELEGATION IS ASSEMBLED AND SENT OUT INTO THE DESERT TO FIND OUT WHO HE WAS. THEY CONFRONT HIM WHILE HE IS BAPTIZING. "ARE YOU THE MESSIAH?" "NO, I'M NOT THE MESSIAH", THERE'S NO HESITATION, HE KNOWS WHAT HE'S ABOUT, BUT AS YET IS GIVING NOTHING AWAY. THE JEWS WERE EXPECTING A MESSIAH (OR CHRIST, IF YOU'RE GREEK) TO COME AND RULE OVER THEM, TO FREE THEM FROM THE OPPRESSION OF THE ROMANS, AND RETURN ISRAEL TO GLORIOUS INDEPENDENCE – THE SORT OF THING THAT ISAIAH WAS TALKING ABOUT.

**“THEN ARE YOU ELIJAH?” “NO” ELIJAH THE PROPHET WAS TAKEN UP TO HEAVEN IN A WHIRL OF WIND, SO THERE IS NO RECORD OF A CONVENTIONAL DEATH. MALACHI, THE PROPHET, SAYS THAT ELIJAH WILL RETURN BEFORE THE “GREAT AND DREADFUL DAY OF THE LORD COMES”.**

**“ARE YOU THE PROPHET?” “NO” WHEN THE ISRAELITES BECOME FEARFUL OF THEIR ALL POWERFUL GOD, IN DEUTERONOMY, MOSES SAYS “THE LORD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM AMONG YOUR OWN BROTHERS. YOU MUST LISTEN TO HIM” IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SIMPLE FOR JOHN TO MAKE THAT CLAIM, BUT THAT IS NOT WHO HE IS.**

**FRUSTRATED THEY FINALLY ASK AN OPEN QUESTION. “WHO ARE YOU? GIVE US AN ANSWER TO TAKE BACK TO THOSE WHO SENT US. WHAT DO YOU SAY ABOUT YOURSELF?”**

**NOW THE PRESSURE IS OFF, AND THEY THINK THE WORST FEARS OF THE LEADERS ARE GOING TO BE RECOGNIZED. BUT THEY HAVE NO IDEA WHAT IS TO COME.**

**“I AM THE VOICE OF ONE CALLING IN THE DESERT, “MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD.” THEY SEEM TO MISS THE**

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FULL QUOTE: ISIAIH 40:3-5a A VOICE OF ONE CALLING: "IN THE DESERT PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD; MAKE STRAIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS A HIGHWAY FOR OUR GOD. EVERY VALLEY SHALL BE RAISED UP, EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL MADE LOW; THE ROUGH GROUND SHALL BECOME LEVEL, THE RUGGED PLACES A PLAIN. AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD WILL BE REVEALED AND ALL MANKIND TOGETHER WILL SEE IT. FOR THE MOUTH OF THE LORD HAS SPOKEN." GOD IN HIS GLORY IS COMING, AND THINGS ARE GOING TO BE ARRANGED IN SUCH A WAY THAT YOU CANNOT MISS IT. HAVING MISSED IT, (THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE QUOTE, NOT GOD ARRIVING) THEY MOVE STRAIGHT ON TO WHAT HE IS DOING. YOU CAN JUST HEAR THE PETTY OFFICIALDOM IN THE QUESTION (OR IS THAT JUST ME):**

**"WHY THEN DO YOU BAPTIZE IF YOU ARE NOT THE CHRIST, NOR ELIJAH, NOR THE PROPHET?" THEN COMES THE BAD NEWS FOR THE DELEGATION, BUT JOHN IS VAGUE ENOUGH FOR THEM NOT TO GET IT. "I BAPTIZE WITH WATER," JOHN REPLIED, "BUT AMONG YOU STANDS ONE YOU DO NOT**

**KNOW. HE IS THE ONE WHO COMES AFTER ME, THE THONGS OF WHOSE SANDALS I AM NOT WORTHY TO UNTIE.”**

**JOHN PUTS HIMSELF IN THE POSITION OF THE LOWEST SERVANT IN A HOUSEHOLD, THE ONE WHO WASHES VISITORS FEET, AND SAYS THAT COMPARED TO THE PERSON HE IS SPEAKING ABOUT HE IS NOT WORTHY OF EVEN THAT LOWLY ROLE. SURELY THIS CAN ONLY BE THE MESSIAH. JOHN HAS POINTED THEM AT JESUS. HE WILL GO ON TO POINT ALL HIS OWN DISCIPLES AT JESUS AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO FOLLOW JESUS INSTEAD OF HIM.**

**SO THAT’S WHAT THE PASSAGES HAVE IN COMMON FOR ME, FROM DIFFERENT DISTANCES IN TIME AND FROM DIFFERENT VIEW POINTS THEY POINT THEIR READERS TOWARDS JESUS. THAT IS ALL WE ARE ASKED TO DO. JOHN IS CALLED A WITNESS – SOMEONE WHO GIVES EVIDENCE OF SOMETHING THEY HAVE SEEN.**

**THAT IS THE SAME THING I AM DOING HERE, JUST REPORTING WHAT I HAVE SEEN, IN MY CASE THIS MORNING’S MESSAGE IS IN PRINT. BUT IT DOESN’T MATTER. THERE IS THE THING WE ARE ASKED TO DO EVERY DAY - JUST POINT**

**PEOPLE TOWARDS JESUS. IT SOUNDS EASY, BUT IT ISN'T.  
THE PROPHETS SUFFERED AND DIED FOR IT, JOHN DIED FOR  
IT, THE DISCIPLES, MOSTLY DIED FOR IT. POINT PEOPLE  
TOWARDS JESUS, IT'S ALL WE HAVE TO DO. AMEN**