

Saint Matthew's/San Mateo Episcopal Church

Advent 3, December 13, 2020

READINGS:

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Canticle 15, BCP 91 (Luke 1:46-55)

I Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

"Who are you?"

The priests and Levites sent by the Jews want to know just who John the Baptizer is. They have come out from Jerusalem to find him and ask him.

John's answer comes in two parts. First, he is very clear about who he IS NOT. He is not the expected Messiah. He is not Elijah the prophet come again, though his clothing and his actions are similar to what might be expected of Elijah. He is not the "Prophet-like-Moses" mentioned in Deuteronomy.

Then, he is equally clear about who he IS. He is, he tells them, the voice crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord." He is baptizing with water. He will be followed by one they do not know, whose sandals he is not worthy to untie.

Jesuit priest John Foley says John the Baptizer seems to say "I am pointing you toward the light...He will be here soon. Hold onto my arm."

God sent a messenger, Luke tells us. He is a person, a real man, named John. He is Jesus' cousin. He has real parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth. He knows who he is in relation to Jesus. He understands what God has called him to do. His job is to announce the coming of the Lord, and to point people toward the light of Christ.

"Who are you?"

What do we say if we are asked "Who are you?" Do we know who we are in relation to Jesus? Do we know what God has called us to do?

I think we do. Isaiah says it in our first reading today. Like Jesus, we are to bring good news; bind up the brokenhearted; proclaim liberty to captives; comfort those who mourn. We are to build up the ruins and repair ruined cities. We are to rejoice in the Lord, who will cause righteousness and praise to spring up. That is our job as the church - to continue doing the job Jesus himself did!

Our proclamation is John's proclamation: "Prepare the way of the Lord!" No one of us can do EVERYTHING to prepare. It is a huge job to level the playing field on which the people of the world are standing, so all God's people can bask in his glory!

But our different identities and gifts can cooperate for God's reign - not focused on ourselves, but on God and our neighbor. Each one of us can say, with John, "I am pointing you toward the light. HE will be here SOON. Hold onto MY arm."

Our voices are different. Our arms vary in strength. No two of us are exactly the same. Yet each life can point the way toward Jesus. Each of us, in our own way, can bind up, proclaim liberty, comfort mourners. Each can help build up and repair. Each of us can rejoice in the Lord, and teach others to do the same!

"Rejoice always," says Saint Paul to the Thessalonians in our reading today. Pray all the time. Give thanks to God in all circumstances. Be open to the working of the Spirit around you (and in you). Don't be naive - test everything and keep the good stuff. Watch yourself, and keep away from evil thoughts and actions.

What better way to strengthen voices and arms! What better way to explore who we are not, and more important, who we are in relation to Jesus!

So, who are you? The world wants to know.

Well...we are a little bit like John the Baptizer.

We are real people, with names, and families, and gifts, and shortcomings.

We are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We understand what God has called us to do: bring good news, bind up, proclaim liberty, comfort mourners, build up, repair, and rejoice in the Lord always.

With John we say to those around us, "I am pointing you toward the light. He will be here soon. Hold onto my arm."

That is the message of the Advent season.

Rejoice!

Amen.