

John 1:6-8 & 19-28

If this morning's Gospel passage seems familiar to you...you may remember all the way back to last Sunday we looked at Mark's version of today's reading...it's a scene of all Israel lining the banks of the Jordan river as John the baptizer calls both sides of the Jewish landscape together...both city dwellers and wilderness wanderers to be one people again at the water's edge in baptism...in this moment...as all are repenting of their sins...Jesus is introduced walking among them to be baptized. The implication is that God is with His people once more. For Mark...It is a sense of inaugurating a new Garden of Eden. Our role and our call...as was true for the Israelites in the baptismal waters...is to recognize that God is inviting us into His story of restoration. Our piety is a reset...we full-on agree to accept the intimacy He and His creation once shared in the evening breeze of the Garden. What we do stems from our total yearning for this reset...to maintain this intimacy. We act because we wish to be pure once more. Advent is getting caught up in God's delightful replenishing therefore...Jesus, himself, is the new Eden and John the Baptist is God's unquestioned herald... And the faithful heed his voice...called to have faithful lives. Walking into the newness of life repentance offers.

This penitence...this shedding of our sinful tendencies...this recalibration which the gospel demands...takes courage...

And for such a display of courage...the payoff is big. In our commitment to God...we are gifted with God himself...life in him...the chaos which follows sin is no match for the calling and nobility it replaces. We are granted fulfillment...as He lived into his claim as messiah...Christ guides us into our born roles as His disciples.

This morning's reading in John's Gospel...The baptizer's conversation near the Jordan appears similar but carries with it a rather different understanding of Jesus' advent. For John...there is an audacity involved in discipleship.

Here...the wise sage...heralding everyone into belief is not so unquestioned or authoritative as He is in Mark. The prophet's great voice and mission are met with push back almost immediately....*who are you?*...onlookers ask. There is a subtle disingenuousness in their asking...in fact ...these men questioning the Baptizer are not even asking for themselves...they ask so that those who sent them may know. They have been sent from the Pharisees...and what they mean to ask is...*by whose authority are you even baptizing...our guys didn't send you...*

...whereas Mark has a heavenly chorus of generations past speaking with the man in animal skins...and in Mark the announcement of Jesus' coming to earth happens almost because heaven cannot contain itself any further...John's Gospel is somewhat subdued...John's focus appears to be on those who do not understand what is going on. In Mark the yearnings of the people carry the movement toward the Jordan...like a conveyor belt of sorts. In John, the mission field is hostile and mistrusting throughout the gospel... the sacred hope is introduced to a stubborn and fractured world...unaware it needs healing.

And so the curt and detached questioning seems to belie the stunning nature of the message itself...though the onlookers don't get it...Jesus is the answer to the world's ills but the cost of accepting it is too high for most. John focuses on the strain of acceptance rather than the palpable yearning of last week. The entire Gospel Jesus will look out of control as the story moves from one hostile encounter to the next...

...yet amidst the hostility...there is a strength that is so wonderfully unique and specific to John's gospel. Only by looking carefully does one see that Jesus never flinches...that He is not nervous...everyone else is. What one sees is not

what is. Marching to the cross...Jesus is in control the entire way...His heart dictates every movement...especially during the trial and his crucifixion. And the Baptizer is, thus, the first noticer...more than a herald...John is strong enough to be faithful to what he sees...and he never buckles to the pressure...thus mimicking Christ. Discipleship is therefore about strength in a hostile world. Advent is about believing in a reality you know to be true...yet is completely concealed by the crowd...by those who would pass judgment on you because they choose not to see.

The truth is that world was made to fit inside God's story... ..that Jesus came to this world in order to envelope us and heal us...eternity came to us to make us eternal. For our part...we must believe this can be done and is already done. We are changed...forever by this profound reality. Advent, for John...is not easy.

Who are you... is the question asked of the prophet in animal skins...and it's the question the gospel asks of us? Do you see yourself as the architect of your world? Or is there One greater than you who grafts your world anew into His? This revelation is profound...because it makes you an instant evangelist.

I just made a lot of people nervous I think.

...God smiling on you...makes you an evangelist. The strength of the story...the message we receive makes us his emissaries. Which means we are all evangelists.

As the forerunner, the Baptizer is...the first evangelist among us. The first revealer. We are all caretakers of the hidden message Christ offers us... Called to make it not so hidden. We are called to be revealers like John. To rejoice in the One who rejoices in us. This takes courage. Discipleship is a commitment...a bold way of life...not loud and confrontational per se...but unashamed...proud to be real.

Who are we? We are healed evangelists...compelled to share our story... For John, there is a profundity of life for those who know how much they are loved. Life is about accepting that the power that holds the universe together has His eye trained on you. John's gospel doesn't start in the desert, it begins in the cosmos. The cosmos thinks of you specifically.

And so...this desire...must be desired...His love is to be reciprocated...and lauded. Your only real choice is to love Jesus back with vigor...to brag on Him as he brags on you in the heavens... this is why you were made...we were made to unfold into a full and substantial life...this is who we are.

Ponder how you evangelize the world with every breath...every second of your existence...with every laugh...with every encounter...with every yearning for a purer life...your entire existence proves that your story perfectly fits into His...all our lives...good, bad and ugly...point to bigger things. Your responsibility is to allow yourself to see it...to believe it.

John calls this humility. Advent is about having the courage to acknowledge that you fit into a grand tale of complete enjoyment...God enjoying you.

The great twist is that you are your first mission. Humility is believing you are worth God's love. Advent is about evangelizing ourselves first. This is John's recalibration. May we believe that we are worth this profound advent...embracing the evangelist we were meant to be...

Amen.