

Sermonettes on Mark 1:1-8 – St. Paul’s Ev. Lutheran Church

December 9-11, 2017 – 2nd Sunday of Advent – Pastor Nate Scharf

John’s Time

“The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way” – “a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

I am thankful for our elected leaders. Yes, they are all sinners, yet God has used them to grant me safety, economy and order. I have to remind myself of that and say it out loud every once in a while because the way the news is and articles are, “nobody is happy with any of their elected leaders.”

Looking at the world into which The Greatest One came, we here just experience a taste of how things were going in the days before Jesus birth. Rome controlled Judea, and all revolts had been squashed. Rome placed vassals over them. Constant turmoil was your lot. A Jewish sect controlled the temple worship and denied any resurrection at all, other sects of Judaism concerned themselves about the legalities of life under the traditions of the elders. Nobody was happy, but they longed for a Messiah – the promised King who would raise, restore, heal. Well, maybe not King Herod, but everyone else seemed to be excited about it. The time had come.

What do you do with a 2 lb. package of frozen ground chuck before you make hamburger patties? You defrost it. What do you do with a deer before you eat venison? You process it. Not everything is as quick as McDonald’s. You have to prepare some things before you can do anything with them. So God sent a forerunner, his appointed messenger, foretold by Isaiah and Malachi, to prepare Judea for the coming of the Messiah. What did he prepare? Hearts. Your hearts, their hearts, my heart – crooked with sin but unwilling to recognize it, hearts burdened by shame and guilt but nowhere to find relief, hearts caught in sinful living and mindsets, but too darkened to see the light that was shining brighter and brighter. God sent John the Baptist to show people the dire and damnable condition of their hearts, to slap an S.O.S. beacon on them so they could see their Savior who was about to appear. Perfect time for *“the beginning of the good news of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God,”* our Savior!

John's Preaching and Result

"And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River."

You remember classic birthday parties in Kindergarten? Relay races dominated the structure, which always set the uncoordinated chubby kid inevitably named Nate Scharf up for failure. Carry an egg on a spoon down and back without dropping. It. Sorry team. But every once in a while there was the mystery object in the bag game. You were blindfolded and allowed to reach your hands into the mysterious paper bag, not plastic. You felt it, squeezed it, examined every part with your hands, but what was it? You guessed and guessed, but you couldn't put a name to it. Finally at the end, the birthday boy's parent revealed what it was, and it was so obvious. Why didn't you think of that?!?

The people were looking for an answer, waiting for God to take the blindfold off and show them what it was that was causing so much trouble and hardship. So God sent John the Baptist to preach. John exposed the deep dark answer that everyone felt, but no one could put a finger on it, sin. Yes, sure other people's sin and immorality affects us, but in specific – your sin, the sin you've committed, are committing, the pet sin you refuse to part with, the old sin that shames you, the new sin that excites you, all of it reveals the problem – your heart. John made no apologies, but called for repentance – turning away from sin and sinfulness and looking to God's mercy and forgiveness. Come clean. Drop the façade. Quit putting perfume on the pig or using make-up at the morgue. Realize the problem – sinful hearts. God is just, but he is not a God you can hide from. He finds you, reaches out to you, and forgives you, cleans you, makes you alive, and puts you on the right path.

People walked to him, some think 100s of thousands, out into the wilderness and those who had ears to hear him were baptized confessing their sins – coming clean and being cleaned spiritually in the waters of their baptism. The result was glorious – God used his preaching to straighten the crooked and the crooks by pointing to the Christ. God used John's preaching to fill in the valleys and to fill the hole in human hearts by holding before them the Savior of the world. God used John's preaching to prepare people for the Greatest One named Jesus Christ who would do all of this. Why did they go out there for? *"A baptism of repentance...**for the forgiveness of sins.**"* They needed forgiveness, and God gave it!

John's Look and Message

“John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.””

Diane tells me to ditch the Alb when I’m preaching – it will make me more accessible and relatable (there is some truth to that). Arthur reminds me of the great symbolism behind the wearing an Alb and how important for ministers of the gospel to use them (there is some truth to that). Neither demand it, but encourage it. John wore camel’s hair clothes and a leather belt. He wore common or poor people clothes and he didn’t have his robe flowing and at ease, no he had it girded up as though he were ready to go with work to do. His food – ceremonially clean locusts and honey that could be found in the places he lived. He ate the poor people local fare. Nothing in his appearance drove people out there to see him. It wasn’t his smile or his fashion sense.

It was his message: *“A baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,” “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”* Some think numbers in the 100s of thousands came out to see John and God moved people by his words. If the one who comes after him is more powerful, how many hearts would be changed by his words, how many eternities would be changed by his actions? And more powerful to a degree that John, this influential preacher who was not caught up in the materialism of his day or the comforts of modern culture, but made his God-given message the priority, and this John was not worthy to do the work of the lowest servant – unstrapping the dirty laces on the dirty feet of this traveler! Who was worthy to stand in the presence of this one coming after John? No one of us is worthy, yet this one invites us to stand in his presence. This one, the Messiah, true God, took on flesh to come to us, rescue us, buy us back with his own blood, and change our eternal future, blot out our past and help us in the present struggles that this life brings us.

And this Messiah, the Christ, Jesus the Savior would grant us not only the forgiveness of sins in baptism, but assures us that we receive his Holy Spirit – and in the perfect measure. The Holy Spirit dwells in your heart, dear baptized child of God. The Holy Spirit has worked through the Word of God in your baptism, in

your hearing of the Word to break down the mountains of materialism in your heart and find your greatest treasure in Jesus. The Holy Spirit has filled in the valleys of doubt and despair with the certain promises of God in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit has taken a crooked conscience and aligned it with his Word that you would walk according to God's commands and do His will. He topples the mountains of anger and arrogance so you see the clearly the Greatest One who comes to you.

What impact did John have on the thousands that went out to him? God sees the heart, but I suppose the only way we would measure with our eyes is by how they lived as they returned home. What impact did John have as he pointed people to the one coming after him? God knows but I guess we would watch to see how well they listened to Jesus teach and how they took it to heart. What impact does John's preaching have on us? God knows our hearts. Let's show what's in our hearts with how we live. Let's show what's in our hearts with how we listen to our Savior Jesus – his love and forgiveness for us, his will and commands to walk in his way. He is the one more powerful than us...for us!
Amen.