

Matthew 3:1-12 - "Preparing the Way through John the Baptist"

Pr. Kurt A. Van Fossan - Midweek Advent 1 - 2021

During this year's mid-week Advent service God will prepare us for Jesus' coming through four of His servants: John the Baptist, Elizabeth, Mary, and Zachariah. First, John the Baptist.

John the Baptist, out of those just mentioned, would probably not be the first choice of most people when it comes to introducing such a joyful event as the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. For a lot of people Advent and Christmas is more of a time of "Awww, isn't the baby Jesus sweet" time of year, not an awe-some time such as when Jesus returns on Judgement Day.

John the Baptist is more of an awesome, Judgement Day type of preacher. Nothing about his appearance was sweet, except maybe the honey he ate with his locust. But even more offensive to people was his message: *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

John didn't shy away from preaching this message to everyone, even the leaders of the church and leaders of the Roman government, like Herod. It certainly wasn't politically correct to call the Pharisees and Sadducees a *"brood of vipers!"* Neither was it safe to expose Herod's adultery. But John the Baptist was a faithful servant of God's Word. He was not called to preach what people's itching ears wanted to hear, but to preach God's Word *"in season or out of season."* And the Law is certainly part of that Word.

No matter what the season, we too need to hear God's Law, which condemns each and every one of us. God's word of Law condemns us not only for the things we do which God tells us not to do, but also for what God calls us to do and we don't. While not all of us are called to the same type of public ministry as John the Baptist or myself, all Christians are called by God to share His words of Law and Gospel to the people He has placed in their lives.

What miserable sinners we are, especially when it comes to our reluctance to share God's Word with others, or to support this work of the Church, since it's through His Word that God works to enable people to repent of their sins and believe in our Savior, Jesus Christ. We too need to repent of our sinful neglect to share God's Word. When we do, that's when the Good News of God's love is so awesome.

And John the Baptist was very outspoken when it came to proclaiming this Good News as well! *"Behold, [he said as he pointed to Jesus], the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29). John's whole ministry was spent turning people away from, or repenting of their sins, and turning them to Jesus Christ as their Savior.

That's one of the most awesome things about Jesus Christ. While He preached the same message as John the Baptist, and was just as bold in condemning sin, especially in the religious leaders, He was also bold in pointing to Himself as the only Savior. *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6). How would He save us? His fire and brimstone words, condemning our sins, were fulfilled through His death on the cross.

For all of us, our judgement day was carried out on the cross when Jesus bore God's judgement for our sins. If we are blessed by God with the gift of the repentance of our sins and faith in the Good News of God's forgiveness, then the day of our death or of Christ's return on the Last Day will not be death for us but life—true and eternal life, as God intended for us in the beginning.

This is the Good News that God wants His people to proclaim according to their various callings. We, like John, are not to trim this message to fit our times. Neither are we to twist it around to make it more acceptable or more "relevant" to the general public. Instead, like John and like Jesus, we are called to boldly proclaim both the Law and Gospel, even if it makes us unpopular or we have to suffer as a result.

We are certainly living in a day and age where God's Word is not longer seen as relevant. As in Isaiah's day, many people today *"proclaim their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it"* (Is 3:9); they *"call evil good and good evil"* (Is 5:20). By rejecting what God's Word says about sin and its consequences, they also send out a message which rejects our need for a Savior. Those in our world today who claim to be tolerant, are certainly not tolerant of God's Word of truth.

As the end of this world draws near, we will be seeing this intolerance of God's Word of Truth more and more, as well as the persecution of those who seek to share the message of God's salvation—the *"power of God for salvation to everyone who believes"* (Romans 1:16). While persecution is not something that's "awww, so sweet," keep in mind that it's only through this message and His Sacraments that God enables people to turn from their sinful ways and be saved.

While many will reject this message, as in the days of old, some will repent and believe, by the grace of God. Therefore we pray that God help us to not be ashamed of Him and His way of salvation through Jesus Christ, but to boldly proclaim it this Advent season and always.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.