

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
Advent III
12 December 2010
Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita
Matthew 11:2-15

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

The icon of Advent is St. John the Baptist.

He's the great preacher of repentance,

“Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” (Mt 3:2).

He's the prophet crying out in the wilderness,

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight” (Mt 3:3)

And he's the one whose finger points to *the coming One*,

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1:29).

But John's ugly.

He stinks of river water and malnutrition.

His clothes aren't in style (and never have been!).

He's lonely, out in the wilderness without any frills or friends.

Sure, he's developed a following—

everyone has come to see him,

even the Pharisees and Sadducees made it out last week!

Some stuck around, listening to his sermons,

watching him baptize with water for repentance,

and sharing his diet of locusts and wild honey.

These disciples were, no doubt, faithful to his preaching.

They recognized John as the prophet,

one commissioned with speaking forth the Word of the Lord;

there's something special about him.

They grew in faith, in knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and in joyful expectation.

But what good are these disciples if they stay with John?

(What good is Advent, if it's not Christmas that follows?)

If the disciples stayed with St. John, they'd be no true disciples—

they'd be heretics and blasphemers,

they'd be lost.

(You might even say that Jewish people today are stuck on St. John.

They keep awaiting the promised Messiah,

and yet are blind and deaf to the fact that He's already come!)

St. John, though, isn't here for himself.

He's here for these disciples,

He's here for all Jerusalem and Judea, and the region around the Jordan (Mt 3:5),

He's here *for you*.

And so St. John won't let his disciples be *his* disciples—
 when he sees Christ,
 he stretches out his bony finger declaring,
“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”
 He makes himself less, that Christ might be more.
“He must increase and I must decrease” (Jn 3:30).

But not all of John's disciples got it.
 Some stuck around, faithful to their teacher, not wanting to jump ship just yet.

John would have none of that!

And here again, in today's reading, John points to *the coming One*.
 He directs all of us who would safely stay with John to move on to the real thing—
 to Jesus, God in the flesh, *the coming One*.

**“Now when John heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples:
 ‘Are You the coming One, or shall we look for another?’”** (Mt 11:2-3).

Of course Jesus is *the coming One*!
 And of course John knew this already.

So why'd he ask the question?

John asks Jesus if He's *the coming One* just like a child asks his mother, “Do you love me?”

By asking the question, John lets Jesus give the answer we all know,
 but love to hear over and over and over again.

By asking the question,
 John points to Jesus preparing His way.

By asking the question,
 John sets his own fears and doubts at ease,
 and all of ours, too.

John is a true teacher and preacher of Advent—
 even in prison, he prepares the way for Christ.

The disciples John sent to ask the question needed to hear Jesus' response.

They needed to hear Jesus say,
**“The blind receive sight,
 the lame walk,
 lepers are cleansed
 and the deaf hear,
 the dead are raised up,
 and the poor have good news preached to them.
 Blessed is the one who isn't offended by Me”** (Mt 11:4-6).

John knew his disciples needed to hear it;
and so do we.

This is John's best preaching—
letting the Christ, *the coming One*, tell of all His works and wonders.
Everything Jesus speaks here fulfills what the prophets spoke long ago.

And that's why you're here today.

What did you expect to find here? **“What did you go out to see?”** (Mt 11:7)
You're not here for entertainment—
for that you're better off at the movies or a Wingnuts game!
You're not here looking for fancy clothes, a successful business, or good stock tips—
you're here because you know you'll hear the Truth.

You might not always like it;
it won't always sit well with you.

But you're here for the Truth—
even if it comes by an ugly, stinky, preacher of repentance.

Like the disciples of St. John,
you quickly get over the imperfections and annoyances,
you don't mind singing out of tune or off beat,
you don't care if someone makes a mistake while reading,
or if a baby cries during the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

You get over the stinky river water, the malnutrition, and the hideous clothing.

You do all this because you've been given *ears to hear*,
and so you *hear!* (Mt 11:15)

You hear of all the works and wonders,
the miracles and the healings of Christ.

You hear what sort of Lord He is—
the kind that cares for the weak and sinful,
the divorced and broken,
the orphaned and widowed.

If you wanted another sort of Lord—
the kind wearing soft clothing, saying whatever pleases the ear,
the kind who floats with whatever's fashionable, hip, or contemporary—
then you've come to the wrong place.

What sort of Lord are you prepared to have?

Well, with St. John the Baptist as your preacher,
 you're prepared for the Lord who comes lowly and humble,
 who empties Himself of power and might and majesty,
 who isn't hurt or offended by your fears and doubts,
 who loves to tell you over and over and over again,
 that yes! He is *the coming One*.

He gives sight to the blind,
 legs to the crippled,
 health to the lepers,
 and ears to the deaf.

He raises the dead
 and proclaims release, freedom, joy, and peace to the poor.

He comes with the Gospel, forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.

Blessed are you who are not offended by this Lord.

Blessed are you who *hear* and *see* and walk and live in Him!

Blessed are you who *see* through the ugliness and stench of your pastor,
 and *hear* of Christ and Him crucified *for you!*

With this Lord, there's much to rejoice in!

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit