

Advent 2C, 2009

Text: Luke 3:1-20

Title: The Loud Prophet

+ INI +

Advent is not a time to be quiet.

We're often quiet and shy in church. Maybe not when it comes to greeting people before and after the service, but once the service starts, we're pretty quiet and reserved. We don't want our voices to stand out. And so we mumble our prayers and whisper our songs, and hope that no one else hears us.

But Advent is not a time to be quiet. Our gospel readings this season are full of people who are loud and bold, even obnoxious at times, loud people who can't keep quiet.

Last week it was the crowd of disciples gathered for Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

They were so loud in praising Jesus, they got on the Pharisees' nerves. "Teacher, tell your disciples to be quiet. Can't you shut them up?"

Do you remember Jesus' reply? What did He say to them? If they are silent, then the stones will cry out.

Their song is our song, too, "Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord," which we sing every week as Jesus comes to us in the bread and the wine.

Today we are confronted by John the Baptist. John the Baptist is likely one of the loudest, boldest, most annoying preachers in all of Holy Scriptures.

His words confront and accuse in a way that we are much too afraid to do today. "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Can you imagine what would happen if preachers actually preached like this today? What would you think if you came to church and were called a snake and were threatened with the fires of hell?

But this loud, bold, obnoxious message is exactly what we all need to hear, especially this Advent.

Jesus is coming, and you're not ready. You need the message of John to wake us up, to prepare us, to get us ready for His coming.

John the Baptist's words applies to you, too. You need to hear his message today.

How many times have you just assumed that you would be saved? Just taken salvation for granted? Said to yourself, "I'm from a Christian family, I live in a Christian country, I belong to a church, I'm set, I don't need to worry."

Repent.

The Christian life isn't about your heritage or your family connections. It's not about being a part of the right group. Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. Repent! This means you!

John's message of repentance is not just for all those other sinners out there. It's for you. Repent! Turn from your sin.

John's message is not complicated or difficult to understand. Look at how he tells people to live. Take a look at your life and treat people in a fair, loving way. Share your food and your clothes. Don't cheat or steal, but be content with what you have.

In a world filled with greed and selfishness, don't get sucked in. Don't make your life about getting rich by any means necessary. Give generously to those who are need and be fair in your dealings with one another.

It's simple, but it's not easy. John's message is loud, obnoxious and annoying. We don't want to hear it, especially this time of year. We don't want to be accused of being sinners who need to repent.

But it's the truth. There's a reason why Jesus came. Not just to be your friend. Not just to entertain you with stories and miracles. Jesus came to save you.

On your own, you would be destined for eternal death. There is no escaping the fires of hell apart from Jesus Christ, and so Jesus came to save you.

"Salvation" can be a lofty, spiritual concept. It's a word you hear in church, and virtually nowhere else.

A more everyday word for "salvation" is "rescue". Jesus is our rescuer. You are trapped and unable to free yourself. And He comes to rescue you.

Picture it like this. Your predicament is like being trapped in a burning building. You are trapped in the burning building of our sin, and there is no way for you to find your way out on your own.

Some people try to ignore the flames. “It’s not that bad, I’ll survive.” Other people try in vain to find their way out and refuse to look for help.

The message of the Law, the message of John the Baptist is the fire alarm. Wake up. There’s a fire. Your life is in danger.

Fire alarms need to be loud and obnoxious. A sweet, calm, soothing fire alarm, does you no absolutely no good. A pastor who does not confront you with your sin in loud and obnoxious words does you no good.

So once you’ve been awakened from your sleep by the fire alarm of the Law, you look at yourself and your predicament, and you realize that there’s no getting out. There’s no way to save yourself, to rescue yourself.

And so you call for help. You call 911. You need to be rescued. You need a savior.

That call for help is confession. “Help, I’m a miserable sinner, I’m trapped, I’m lost, I’m going to die.”

Again, a calm, soothing call for help doesn’t do any good. Imagine calling 911 and saying, “Everything’s okay, we could just use a little help if you’ve got the time, but things really aren’t too bad.”

No, when your life is in danger, you yell, you scream, you cry, you plead, you get as loud and obnoxious as you can, so that you get someone’s attention.

When you confess your sins, make it a 911 call for emergency help. When you pray, pray as though someone was actually listening who can help you, come to your aid, and rescue you.

John’s voice wakes you up, like a fire alarm in the middle of the night. John’s voice helps you to realize that your life is in danger and that you need to be rescued.

But John is not your savior. John is the one who points out your need for a savior. When people ask if John He is the Christ, He says, “No, but He’s coming soon.”

We know that our Savior, our rescuer is Jesus Christ.

He enters the burning building of our sinful world. He comes crashing through the door this Christmas without any regard for Himself.

Jesus comes, not just as a cute little baby to be cuddled and played with. Jesus comes to die, to give His life to rescue you.

Jesus comes bringing the Holy Spirit. Remember Spirit is breath, is words. Jesus comes to breathe His Spirit into you.

When Jesus pulls you out of the burning building, He gives you CPR, mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. He breathes His Spirit into your smoke-filled lungs and gives you new breath, new life.

The Holy Spirit gives you new words to say, loud and strong and clear and bold. The Holy Spirit turns your cries for help to songs and hymns of praise to the one who saves you, who rescues you, who sets you free.

Are you feeling quiet, shy, and timid? Come and be filled with Holy Spirit. He will loose your tongue and give you a new song. "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise."

You are filled today with the Holy Spirit through God's Holy Word. In a few minutes you will be unleashed on an unsuspecting world, a world used to Christians who are shy and quiet and afraid.

The Holy Spirit gives you boldness to speak loudly, to be obnoxious, if necessary, to wake up the other folks who sleep while their houses burn.

But you can't expect to be loud out there if you're afraid to be loud in here.

So no more whispered prayers and half-hearted songs. You have been saved, you have been rescued, you have new life breathed into you by Jesus Himself, so be bold and be loud, both in here and out there.