

Be Like John.
Advent 3B – John 1:6-8, 19-28
Gary Eichelberger - Christ Church Greenville – December 14, 2014

Be like John. Be like John.

In Advent, especially in Advent, we are called to be like John. We are called to be like John the Baptist. That calling is one of the reasons that our Gospel readings from the Second and Third Sundays of Advent always focus on John the Baptist.

Now, don't worry. I'm not encouraging you to move into the desert, wear camel's hair clothing, or eat only locusts and wild honey (as Mark described him in last week's Gospel lesson).

We are not called to imitate John in **dwelling, dress, or diet** – but rather we are called to imitate him in **denial, demeanor and desire**.

Every year at this time – during the second and third Sundays of Advent – the Gospel passages focus on the message and ministry of John the Baptist – specifically, what he was doing in order to prepare a way for the Lord – in order to prepare the world – or at least the world to which he had access – for the coming of the Messiah – for the words, ministry, and transformational life and death of Jesus of Nazareth.

If you recall, Advent starts, on the First Sunday, with a focus on the final judgment—on the End Times when Jesus will return in great glory, it then turns – in the second and third Sundays – to the ministry of John the Baptist and what he did in order to prepare the world for Jesus, and then, next week, in the Fourth and final Sunday of Advent, it concludes with an emphasis on the pregnancy of Mary and her unborn baby, Jesus – as we anticipate the celebration of the great Feast of Christmas.

Thus, the Four Sundays lead us in a chronologically backward procession toward the manger—and, in doing so, they help to remind us that the work of Advent is not merely preparation for the awe and wonder of the birth of the baby Jesus – but also preparation for the hard work of discipleship to the ministry of Jesus incarnate – and ultimately, for his glorious return in the End Times.

Advent begins with the End, and ends with the beginning. So here we are, with John the Baptist, in the middle. And, being in the middle, being in that time of waiting, wanting, and watching is what we do as a church.

In this time, we are called like John to be witnesses to the Light—so that all might believe through him.

So what does it mean to be like John? If we are not called to imitate John in dwelling, dress, or diet, what would it mean to be called to imitate him in **denial, demeanor and desire**?

Denial - Be like John – acknowledge who you are not.

As the chorus to a recent folk song says, “I believe in God, and God ain’t me. I believe in God, and God ain’t us.”

John was a great prophet. He was a major religious figure in his day—and had built a significant following. He was known to – and, in some instances, feared by – the political and religious authorities of his time.

But, irrespective of his success, John was quick to acknowledge that he was not the Messiah. He was preparing the way for another. He was a sign pointing to Jesus.

In Advent, we are called to remember that we are not in control—and we are not the center. We are not the Messiah—we are not God. Instead, we are witnesses preparing the way, pointing to the light that was, and is, and is to come.

No matter how important you think you may be—no matter what anyone tells you, you cannot ruin Christmas. Irrespective of whether your gift list is long or short, whether you have everything taken care of or haven’t even gotten started, the gift of Christmas is already taken care of.

Everything that we do in Advent needs to be done in humble recognition of that truth—we are not God, we are not the Messiah, we are not in control. As John the Baptist says later in John’s Gospel, “He must become more. I must become less.” Jesus must increase. We must decrease.

Demeanor - Be like John – be willing to cry out, be willing to be peculiar.

John was not afraid to be odd. He was not afraid to ruffle some feathers as he sought to prepare folks for Jesus’ ministry.

The way in which we journey through Advent and prepare to celebrate Christmas should not be defined merely by shopping and lists and hurriedness – we don’t have to celebrate according to the dictates of the larger culture – or, for that matter, according to the expectations of our relatives or friends. We are not going to make this “the best Christmas ever” – because that Christmas happened over 2000 years ago.

Desire - Be like John – prepare the way, both in your heart and in the world around you, for Jesus.

John’s heart was uniquely prepared to receive the presence of his Lord and Savior—and, as a result, was uniquely positioned to prepare others to receive him.

From Luke's Gospel, we are told that John's first encounter Jesus was while both he and Jesus were in the wombs of their respective mother's – Jesus in Mary's belly and John in Elizabeth's. And we are told that the unborn John leapt in his mother's womb when he sensed that his Lord and Savior was near. John was acutely attuned to the presence of God.

I remember the awe and wonder that I felt the first time that I became convinced that our own unborn child recognized my voice. I had just entered the room and said something, when my wife, Kacey, said, "Look, she hears your voice." And, as I spoke again, I could see the response of our unborn daughter.

Each of our three children would, in time, learn to respond to my familiar voice –and the voices of others who loved them – from the warm darkness of the womb. And, though none of us remember it, we were all once in the womb—and we all leapt in the presence of familiar voices.

Part of what we do in Advent is to try to focus our minds, our hearts, and our lives in a way that we might hear the familiar voice of God in the midst of the chaos of our lives – that we might prepare a space that welcomes the presence of God – that we might recognize God when he draws near – and that we might then leap for joy.

That we might be like John.

On this third Sunday of Advent, people of Christ Church, go and be like John.