

Matthew 3:1-12, Is. 11:1-10
Waiting for Peace
Sunday December 4th, 2022

A story is told about three women were standing around bragging about their children. The first said, “My son grew up to be a Lawyer!”



The second said, “My son grew up to an Engineer!”



The third woman was quiet for a while and then piped up and said, “My son grew up to be a signpost!”



Now being a signpost is not on the top of the list of any person’s job list, even so it’s a job, and its honest work. But here in our scripture we read of a person who actually grew up to be a sign post and everyone was proud, (except of course those who had him killed)!

John the Baptist was a signpost for Jesus. His job was to point to the coming Messiah, the Christ. As he himself said, “I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

In the gospel of Matthew John the Baptist appears suddenly on the scene. In Matt. right before John the Baptist appears, the last story we read is of Jesus as a small boy, probably 12, and then suddenly John the Baptist “appeared in the wilderness of Judea proclaiming ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’”

Here the ground is prepared for Jesus' ministry and John the Baptist was the signpost pointing to him. The prophecies of this time were written down 700 to 430 years before they occurred. Isaiah spoke of the appearance of John the Baptist 700 years before when he wrote, "A voice cries out: **"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."**

Malachi prophesied 430 years before John the Baptist's appearance, **"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me."** The stage had been planned and set. And when John the Baptist appeared he was dressed in the clothing and ate the food of a prophet, and in particular the prophet Elijah.

John the Baptist came in the spirit and demeanor of Elijah in fulfillment of prophecy and all the prophecies pointed to Jesus.



John the Baptist was rough in demeanor, speech and message, and his message was the same message that Jesus brought, **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."** John the Baptist then went on in no uncertain terms to call sin, sin and call the powerful and weak alike to repentance, to a turning away from sin towards a lifestyle of righteousness and the love of God.

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Jesus Christ and John the Baptist spoke the same message. Both spoke of the need for repentance. Both spoke of the Judgement of God. Both spoke of sin, redemption, and new life.

The tone of John the Baptist was harsher. But we miss completely the importance of Grace if there is no judgement. Without judgement all our interactions in this world become selfish and selfishly motivated. Chaos reigns and we do not have liberty, we have libertinism.

Recognition of the seriousness of sin, that leads to judgement, is of absolute importance to understanding Grace. Our liberty comes from recognition of sin. Not by justifying our sin, or ignoring our sin, or saying

we aren't as bad as others or claiming we are baptized, or members of a Church. God can make children of Abraham out of stones John reminds us.

It is only when we recognize we are sinners in need of a Savior that we can be saved, which is why we need people like John in our lives that can point out the painful truths. They lead us to repentance a change of our minds, our hearts, and our lifestyles.

John the Baptist confronted Kings and in particular Herod. He confronted the religious authorities the Pharisees and Sadducees. He confronted the common people of the land with their sin and called them all to turn to God. He called people to rid their lives of things that steal and destroy peace. He called one and all to bear the fruit of repentance: a changed mind, a heart turned towards God, and a lifestyle turned from sin to righteousness.

Now some in the church today are called to speak to Kings and president, cultures, and societies. But most are called to simply speak to family & friends. The message for all who speak and those who listen is to turn to God and bear the fruit of repentance. We are all called to be signposts.

Now it is hard to relate to John the Baptist and God's message through him, because he wore strange clothing even for his day (camel's hair robe and leather belt) and ate locust that even in his day weren't on many people's menus.

He also spoke to royalty, government and religious leaders, people in power and confronted them. He spoke to powerful people who most of us would never dream of meeting much less confronting. So the call to repent and bear the fruit of repentance seems to be for someone else and someplace else than you and I, here and now.

But remember last week how I spoke of the two meanings for "waiting"? Waiting can mean we are "waiting" for Christmas or "waiting" for a bus. Or it can mean "waiting on someone" like a waitress waiting on a table, **waiting in terms of serving**. It is in that second sense that

today I want us to consider our and John the Baptist's mission of "Waiting for Peace." We need to serve towards peace.

The question is what are you and I doing to serve the cause of peace? Or to put it another way, **what are you and I doing to serve people to bring the peace of the Kingdom of God here on earth?**

Now again we might think "this doesn't apply to me, because I have no power to bring a peaceful end to the fighting in Ukraine". But we sent last week a generous \$12,000 donation by one of our members on top of \$1000s of others to take care of and bring peace to the lives of the Ukrainians who suffer. And how about peace to your family, your home, your neighborhood, yourself? What are you doing to bring peace to this very chaotic world? Where are you an instrument of God's healing?



The Isaiah reading shows what the ideal will one day be, the wolf lying down with the lamb. We know in this world that such a thing would not be peaceful for the wolf would be called "Hungry" and the lamb named "Lunch".

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In an Upper Room devotional, a story was told of a woman in Africa who took just a few minutes out of her day to help three small, scared girls cross a very busy road. Not a great earth-shattering act of service in some great cause of peace, but for those three small girls, in that moment it meant all the world to them.

As Mother Teresa said, **"We can't do great things. We can only do little things with great love."**

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Sin steals peace from persons, families, societies and the world. We need to call sin, sin in order to address it. Jesus always demanded the name of a demon before he cast it out. We need to get in touch with Jesus so that we can see what is bringing chaos to our world and others, and name it, so that we all can find peace.

In our society today there are such conflicting and changing definitions of sin and thus the birth of the “cancel culture”, which makes one month one person or cause something to be canceled, and the next month redeems it, and then moves on to someone else’s life to cancel and destroy all to the mantra of “You shouldn’t judge others.” While judging and condemning. We are adrift with a mob cut loose from our ties to God and God’s word.

Folks, there is One Judge who is God and starting with the 10 Commandments has laid out sins to turn from, and God to turn towards. When people of “God given wisdom” interpret the Bible, we can discern right from wrong, sin from righteousness. We can stand with John the Baptist and declare sin to be sin while holding out the grace of God and new life in Jesus.

In this world sin causes “hurt and destruction”. Hurt and destruction will not be present in the New Heaven and Earth that both the Isaiah and Matthew passages speak too. Isaiah 11:9, **“They will not HURT OR DESTROY on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”**

This peace and restoration won’t happen in this world, but we can work toward it we can serve toward it. We can move towards perfection-perfect love of God and human beings.

You can see from reading the Isaiah passage that the sin and chaos that is in this world affects the created order, the plants, and in particular here, the animals. Sin creates chaos and destroys peace and we as United Methodist Christians are called to address what we can as we can. And do all the good as long as we can.

Our Mission statement reflects this, **“To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”** “The world” includes the created order, the plants, and animals, the land, air, and sea. It’s not radical environmentalism; but one that takes seriously our first job as human beings, our first work here on earth is to be stewards of our planet.

Ultimately, total peace will only be found in the New Heaven and Earth, but whenever we seek to be serving peace, waiting for peace in the many forms it can take; we are bringing the future Kingdom of Heaven to the here and now of earth.

So serve the cause of Peace, wait on Peace wherever you can this season. In your circle of family and friends is there someone you need to call and make peace with? That's a terrifying question for some.

Do you personally need to make peace with God? Colossians 1:19-20 says, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile

to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, **BY MAKING PEACE** through the blood of his cross."

You have been given the power through the blood of the cross to bring peace, to be peace in these situations and more. Do you have someone in your life you need to invite to turn to God or turn back to God in this season? If you can't find the words, they are spoken here in one form or another every week in worship. Just invite that friend or relative to be here with you.

Now I would submit to you that the words of prophecy that were spoken of for John the Baptist are also for you and for me. It was prophesied that he would "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

This prophecy applies to everyone in this room, who has repented and believes in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

This prophecy is for you to fulfill!

As part of the Church of Jesus Christ you are as called as John to prepare the way of the Lord for other people. You are as called and as capable as John was to call people to repent--to turn to God in this

season and bear the fruit of repentance. You don't have to be as harsh as John the Baptist.

You can be as gentle as Philip who invited his brother Nathanael to meet Jesus by saying, "Come and see."

You might think that only pastors or evangelists are called to do this. I would submit to you that all baptized Christians are called to fulfill this prophecy.

Life is God given and made for a purpose and in this season of the year our purpose is to prepare ourselves through repentance for the Advent of Jesus Christ. Our purpose is to turn our hearts and minds and lives to God and to be signposts to invite others to turn with us.

All the celebrations of the birth of Jesus help us to turn, to repent and invite others for the focus of most of the celebration in America is on the birth of the Christ Child. We can use this to call and invite.

This is a perfect week and season to do this. We have the Chancel Choir Cantata. We have Christmas Eve services. We have many opportunities every week to help ourselves and others turn to God.

I want to close with a video clip called Christmas Invite. It is a call to invite who you know and love to meet the Christ Child through the worship and fellowship of Vista Church.

ROLL: CHRISTMAS INVITE

Again, strive to make peace with self, God, Family and Friends and all of creation as we turn to God in worship in this season. We need each other to live out the change that happens in our hearts, our minds and our lives when we give them to Jesus. Repent, believe, act and invite.

What is God saying to you? And most importantly what are you going to do?..... Amen.

Could the Stephen Ministers bring forward the Communion elements.