



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN

This sermon is the fourth in our Advent series called “Prepare Ye” and it is titled, “The Word of God Came to John”.

Nadin Khoury was thirteen years old, five foot two and weighed—soaking wet—one hundred pounds. Nadin and his family escaped war-torn Liberia. Once in America, his family settled in Philadelphia. In 2011, Nadin Khourty was a new kid in Philly with a single mom who was an African immigrant looking for work. That is the kind of kid bullies spot from a million miles away.

One day, for thirty minutes, seven teenage bullies kicked and beat Nadin, dragged him through the snow, stuffed him into a tree and hung him on a seven-foot spiked fence. Nadin survived the attack, and would have faced another one, if it had not been for the folly of one of the bullies. He filmed it all and posted it on YouTube. Police saw it and threw the bullies behind bars. Talk about dumb criminals.

A worker at a national morning show heard about it and invited Nadin to appear on the broadcast. Unknown to Nadin, the producer had also invited three members of the Philadelphia Eagles football team to appear on the show as well.

One was All-Pro wide-receiver DeSean Jackson. Jackson said, “Nadin, I’m here for you man, anytime you need me”. Then, in full view of every bully in Philly,

DeSean Jackson gave Nadin Khoury his cell phone number. Bullies think twice before they harass a kid who has an NFL player's number on speed dial.

I am sure if we asked any of the four teachers in the congregation, we would find that even though there are campaigns present today that were not around in Nadin's time, there is still too much bullying going on even in our Park Falls school district. Unfortunately it is a way of life for our children. Kids are mean to one another for silly reasons. It is a cultural phenomenon that needs to stop.

Even as adults we all have our fair share of bullies; sin, shame, guilt and blame. The biggest bully on the block however, is a liar and the father of all lies. We know him as the devil and call him Satan. Satan hits us with his lies and rubs our face in our dirt. He wants to destroy us. So what do we do when we are confronted? We run. And we run some more. Then we keep on running. That is why God sent a man named John—John the Baptist.

The setting: In his first two verse of chapter three, Luke provides the setting; answering the questions: When? Who? And where? In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar is the when. That was approximately 29 A.D. The who was John the Baptist, son of really old parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth. And the where is somewhere in the wilderness.

John is a young boy waiting for his public appearance to Israel. Now, in chapter 3 of Luke, John is still in the wilderness, a little older, a young man, but the waiting is over. John's ministry begins. And his ministry is for people frantically on the run.

The salvation. Luke 3:5-6 says "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." Folks this is great news! Salvation is for all people—even people who feel as though they are running for their lives. People running from problems that no one else understands. People running from bad relationships, bad feelings and bad breaks. People running from a painful past; a perplexing present; and a future that looks like a train wreck waiting to happen. For such people there is salvation! WOW!

"All flesh shall see the salvation of God." Shepherds see the salvation of God (Luke 2:15). Simeon says, "My eyes have seen your salvation". (Luke 2:30) Fishermen (Luke 5:1-11), tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:27-32) see God's salvation. And from a sycamore tree even little Zacchaeus sees the salvation

of our God. (Luke 19:4) The angel puts it this way on Christmas, “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.” (Luke 2:10)

When the liar is rubbing my face in my sin and shame, guilt and blame, too often I run to all the wrong places. It is easy to look to other people. And a job. And money. And our vacations. And all our stuff. These are good gifts. These are grand gifts. But these are not my salvation. There is only one salvation that can defeat devils, demons and darkness. But watch out!

We can all be self-deceived. We cannot say to ourselves that “we have Abraham as our father.” We like the Pharisees and Sadducees would miss God’s salvation because of pride. Just because of their Jewishness, they thought there were guaranteed a place in the covenant.

John says that we are saved, not by grace, but by God’s grace alone. God’s amazing and life-changing grace is the only way we are saved. Grace, John says, comes through repentance and baptism, in which our roles are completely passive as we surrender to God’s love, distance ourselves from our past ways of sin and profess our allegiance to the coming one—Jesus.

Jesus, who is the Savior, as we hear in the closing verses of our Gospel reading this morning; “As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questions in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah. John answered all of them by saying, ‘I baptize you with water; but the one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’” John is not the Christ, the anointed Davidic deliverer and king. John is the proclaimer. It is Jesus that has the power!

And Jesus comes to fight the bullies on our behalf? That is what Luke 4 is all about. Jesus meets the bully in the wilderness and three times defeats him with the thunderous, “It is written”. Throughout Luke’s gospel Jesus casts out devils and demons. Jesus announces the salvation of our God!

Yes, Jesus fights Satan for our health and for our family. Jesus fights for our salvation and for our restoration. And Jesus fights for our final resurrection. Are the odds against you? Is the coach against you? Is the boss against you?

Is your health against you? Are your emotions against you? Does it seem as though everything is against you? Difficult, for sure. But, Jesus fight for YOU.

Yes, Jesus fights for you. You with the broken past. You with the aging body. You with the absentee father. You with the lost job. You with the bad back, the bad credit score and the bad grades. Jesus fights for the “yous” of the world. Are you a you? If so, then Jesus fights Satan for you. Jesus defeats Satan for you. And the day is coming when Jesus will destroy Satan for you. Jesus even gives you his number on speed dial. And what would that number be? B I B L E.

We have two beagles that live across the street from us. They are little escape artists and their owners often call and ask if we can help keep an eye out for them. Probably thinking they would come over to see our Gunny. So when I read this story of Howard the beagle, I had to retell it to you.

The writer tells it this way. I used to have the cutest beagle dog. His name was Howard. And Howard could run. Man could Howard run! I would take Howard running with me. Why, Howard could put in eight miles like nobody’s business. An aside. Have you all seen the commercial on TV lately that has a lady sitting on a park bench telling passerbys that she has her 10,000 steps in today. As she says this her dog runs up to her with her watch on. Cute. Anyway, back to our story.

When I took Howard with me, sometimes he would run away.

One summer day, Howard was running away again! I caught up with him and I got to within ten feet of that darn dog. Howard stopped dead in his tracks. We looked at each other straight in the eye. Howard had a choice. He could either listen to me or take off running. What did Howard do? You guessed it. Howard took off running again!

And now I ask, what do you do? I know I run. You run. We all run. And we run some more. And we keep on running because he is after us. “He”? You know. The bully on the block, the father of lies, the devil, himself trying to again, rub our faces in the dirt. But we do not have to keep running through life. Why is that? And a good thing as I get tired just thinking about running. Well. . . .

God sent a man named John, John the Baptist. The setting? 29 AD in the wilderness. The salvation. For all people. The self-deception belongs to the

one who says "I don't need repentance and baptism" Salvation belongs to the one who has a Savior? The Savior? Jesus Christ!

And Jesus invites us to stop running, turn around and look straight into his tender eyes, trusting these magnificent words of 1 Samuel 17:47. "The battle belongs to the Lord!" AMEN