**12/8/24**

**John in the Wilderness**

**Vicar Vince Piekarski**

**Luke 3:1-6 (NRSVUE)**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSVUE) (2) **Amen.**

Welcome back to the party folks! Here we all are on the second week of Advent! We have lit the second candle on our wreath! The birthday month continues on! Unfortunately, each time we light a candle we also come to very realization that we are inching oh so closer to the very season of winter, and we are inching closer to those darker days that lie ahead as well. Although, with that little bit of negative feeling and reality, we also come to realize that much more important times lie ahead, and that we are moving on towards them as well. For each candle we light also decreases our time of waiting. We move along lighting these candles here on our Advent wreath in that holy expectation, anticipation, and hope of the glorious and amazing birth that we will get to celebrate together again this year during our Christmas Eve Service. We will be celebrating the very light of the world coming to us in the form of a babe in a manger. That is the very day that all of these candles up here will be lit, we will definitely rejoice and sing, and we will take comfort yet again in what the scriptures have promised us and delivered. Amen to that!

With that being said, let me also revisit last week’s important message. For we were informed or even reminded that we are not only in anticipation of this particular arrival in a manger that we have been celebrating for well over some two-thousand years now. We are also very much in anticipation of the second coming of Christ. This means that just as we prepare for Christmas during this season of Advent, we must also continue on with our daily preparation and mindfulness as we attend to the anticipation of the arrival of “‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory.” (2) As we heard in our Gospel Reading in Luke chapter 21, verse 27 last week. We should be looking forward to this as verse 28 from that same Gospel Reading last week calls us to “stand up and raise (y)our heads, because (y)our redemption is drawing near.” (2) We are seeking and expecting of that everlasting and eternal prize that is wrapped up in all of scripture, and all of these great and magnificent things that have occurred, and what is yet to come as well.

Alright, let me not get too far ahead of myself here with all this information and these scenarios, all this candle lighting, and all this work and preparation. Let me thank you all once again for your continued commitment to this very community, and this very congregation here at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church. We are glad that you have managed to join us here in the pews, or out there on the conference call. It is oh so very important that we are together to continue to support one another, and to wrestle and grapple with the text provided to us from scripture. As Mathew chapter 18, verse 20 reminds us, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”” (2) Let us always remember that very verse and its importance as we gather together each time for a service in this place, anywhere else, or even virtually on a conference call or any other platform. There is indeed strength and importance in togetherness! It is in scripture for a reason, folks. So, let us continue to gather and learn!

As we move forward onto this week’s fairly short Gospel Reading, we actually get some history and story in the mix. We start off with hearing a list of names that was the actual government and people that John the Baptizer was working in and through during the times of his ministry. These very government figures would be that which shaped the times and area of the world that Christ would be working in, and in which he would be conducting his ministry as well. Now, I also know it is very easy to brush right over these lists of names and things like this. All too often we feel these types of things are not that important, or quite frankly we just have a tendency to glance right over them in an effort to get to the good stuff, that of course is being the actual story. Well, I will admit to you all that is my stubbornness for sure, as history has never really been one of my major interests or focuses. So, this is precisely where I tag myself out, and I tag in some of the writers from all the various research and reading that I do to be able to provide you and I with just a little more context here today. As we pay attention to these little but important details, we even get a new term to put in our arsenals, and that very term is “salvation history. That is, God brings about salvation not in the abstract or in theory, but through concrete events, real people, in actual places of history—with Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension being the quintessential example. God saves not in Neverland or “somewhere over the rainbow,” but in history. Corrupt, messy, and complicated as historical events and situations are, that is where God saves.” (4) So, when you and I think that our world is just a mess in the here and now, we are very much reminded of the mess that John and Jesus were working in and through with the government and the people back then as well. We were reminded that it was this mess that Christ was interjected into, and that this mess always has existed no matter the time or viewpoint or location.

As a matter of fact this “salvation history” (4) really helps each and every one of us as we come to talk about Christ as real and present person here on this earth just like you and I. That honestly really amazes me about our faith at times. For in my mind, it really just makes things so much more real for some reason. I mean Jesus being born, living through life as a child and growing up, learning a trade and working as a carpenter, creating relationships with family and friends, and eventually beginning his ministry and traveling about all while dealing with real-life tragedies and hardships is not just some story we read about in a book, or some fairytale. These real life and relatable things make it a bit easier for you and I to share the story with folks, because it really did happen. Jesus truly lived a life just like you and I, and experienced many of the same hardships. Through that very list of names we read on the front end of our Gospel Reading we can actually even pinpoint a time to all of that as well.

Yes, we also know the flipside of the coin, and we unfortunately know the rest of the story as well. You know that death and the cross story? However, I assure you that we will dig into that much more in the coming months when we revisit things during Lent and Easter. What I do assure you and I of is the simple fact that we need all of this story. We need this very birth we are marching on towards during this birthday month, and we need John’s very work and ministry to be able to even be able to get to that point. We need John the Baptizer to come into the fold and pave the way for Jesus. As with any good story there is a set-up or a prelude, and of course there is a postlude, or continuation to the end as well. Each story has many different levels to it, and many people continue to contribute to it, and that also includes you and I to this very day. This story continues on, and this story continues to play out through you and I. We get to experience and live out our very faith in life in context to all of this.

Let me change your viewpoint and perspective here a little bit and share with you what I also find as being extremely unique leading up to John and Jesus’ births. For we hear earlier in the book of Luke that John as a baby actually leaped in his mother’s womb! I mean, John was so excited when he recognized Mary’s voice when she visited his mother. He was extremely happy to have Jesus in his presence, even if it was actually in his mother’s belly. I really encourage you to read that over for yourself if you desire, as it is in Luke chapter 1, verses 39 to 45. I mean, how cool is it that even in the womb John may have realized the important work he had to do before his cousin would even be born? How cool is it that he was so excited to be around his cousin, because he knew what his cousin would mean to so many people and the world? Was John truly accepting his call and his purpose right then and there? I know that all may seem like a little bit of a stretch, but I doubt it actually is sometimes, because it is well researched and documented that the womb is a very influential place for a child after the fourth month of pregnancy. Let alone the author of the book of Luke included those very details in the story. If those very details were not important then they probably would have never even been considered, let alone made the final cut for the Bible’s composition. This story was inspired and meant for you and I to hear and appreciate, and to even share.

Alright, back to our story at hand here today. What else is it that we hear and need to kind of break down or wrestle with after we get through that very list of names? Well, we actually hear that John was out in the wilderness. However, we are reassured that this is no magic or trick as he “does not simply appear one day in the desert. Luke suggests that his growth and spiritual strength actually develop there.” (5) The wilderness was his proverbial gym or practice field, and that means as he developed and grew in the faith people came to actually notice. Furthermore, we also learn and are reassured of the fact that he was not forcing his message upon anyone. Instead, we are actually informed that people were coming to him to hear the message, and receive the good news. The people also put some action behind it, as they would receive the “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” that we hear about in verse 3 from our Gospel Reading. This message and these gifts had a deeper meaning as well. For “John’s message was not to repent for repentance’s sake. He redirected hearers to God—with the promise of salvation (the forgiveness of sins). John’s message was not purely negative: he called people to recalculate their lives, turning intentionally to a lasting source of life and reconciliation.” (4) Let me reword that a little bit, or give us all a different perspective here. As “Preparing for God’s arrival means rethinking systems and structures that we see as normal but that God condemns as oppressive and crooked. It means letting God humble everything that is proud and self-satisfied in us, and letting God heal and lift up what is broken and beaten down.” (7) Let Go and Let God is the true definition here. Pretty easy, but yet oh so complicated. For I know for certain that our pride and ego often get in the way, and letting go is not a skill too many of us have, and we need to learn and relearn and even accept over time. What is for certain is that our very creator put that skill in us as well, and we just have to embrace it to be able to experience everything that was intended.

So, as we close things out together here with this sermon, and as we come together again next week and light candle number three on our Advent wreath, I assure you that we will learn more about John and this story. However, let me also forewarn you that there may be some harsh words in that very story. For sometimes we all know and have even experienced that we have to say things in a manner that really does get people to pay attention or to even focus. I can confirm for certain that John does precisely that next week in our Gospel Reading. We are also reminded in the last verse today that “all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ ” (2) We will indeed see that and celebrate that in the coming weeks when we reach Christmas, and we will indeed do so yet again when Christ returns again!

Amen!

**References & Study Points**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

Preaching

Year C 2025

December 8th, 2024

2nd Sunday of Advent

(2) BibleGateway.com

(3) The Four Pages of The Sermon

Revised and Updated

A Guide to Biblical Preaching

Paul Scott Wilson

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Abingdon Press

(4) WorkingPreacher.org

Second Sunday of Advent

Where would John’s prophetic critiques focus today?

December 8, 2024

Commentary on Luke 3:1-6

Troy Troftgruben

(5) WorkingPreacher.org

Second Sunday of Advent (Year C)

Last week’s lectionary passage took us nearly to the end of Luke’s story (Luke 21).

December 9, 2018

Commentary on Luke 3:1-6

Michal Beth Dinkler

(6) WorkingPreacher.org

Second Sunday of Advent

All flesh shall see the salvation of God

December 5, 2021

Commentary on Luke 3:1-6

Audrey West

(7) WorkingPreacher.org

Second Sunday of Advent (Year C)

Today’s Gospel begins not with the Baptist’s ringing call to repentance, but with a

long and detailed list of rulers.

December 6, 2015

Commentary on Luke 3:1-6

Judith Jones

(8) WorkingPreacher.org

Second Sunday of Advent (Year C)

In a world where religion and politics are often intermingled with confusing, alarming,

and even devastating results, and in a nation that defines itself in large part by

claims of separation of church and state, Luke 3 may well sound like the advent of

the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

December 9, 2012

Commentary on Luke 3:1-6

Karl Jacobson

(9) SermonCentral.com

Ready For Christmas! But Ready For Christ?

Contributed by Don Schultz on Dec 4, 2003

Scripture: Luke 3:1-6

Denomination: Lutheran

(10) SermonCentral.com

No John, No Jesus

Contributed by Tim Zingale on Dec 4, 2003

Scripture: Luke 3:1-6

Denomination: Lutheran

(11) SermonCentral.com

We Prepare Series

Contributed by Kevin Ruffcorn on Dec 9, 2009

Scripture: Luke 3:1-6

Denomination: Lutheran

**Luke 3:1-6 (NRSVUE)**

John the Baptist is a herald of Jesus, whose way is prepared by “repentance for

the forgiveness of sins.” As we hear the careful record of human leaders, we

sense the spectrum of political and religious authority that will be challenged by

this coming Lord.

1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was

governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of

the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, 2 during the

high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of

Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the region around the Jordan,

proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4 as it is written

in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

  “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

  ‘Prepare the way of the Lord;

   make his paths straight.

  5 Every valley shall be filled,

   and every mountain and hill shall be made low,

  and the crooked shall be made straight,

   and the rough ways made smooth,

  6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’ ”

**(Not Used)**

**Theme Statement: What is God doing in or behind this text?**

**(Active verb, saving or empowering action, complete thought, and a simple short sentence)**

**Four Page Method**

**Page One (Trouble in the Text) (Characters Only)**

**Page Two (Trouble in the World) (Us Only)**

**Page Three (Grace in the Text) (God & Characters)**

**Page Four (Grace in the World) (God & Us)**

**Sermon Unity Elements: The Tiny Dog Now Is Mine**

**Text (41-42):**

**Theme (42-48):**

**Doctrine (48-50):**

**Need (50-52):**

**Image (52-56):**

**Mission (56-57):**