

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Second Sunday of Advent - Year A

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Isaiah 11:1-10

Psalm 72:1-7. 18-19

Romans 15:4-13

Matthew 3:1-12

12/08/2019

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

1In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming,  
2“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” 3This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.’”

4Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, 6and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

7But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8Bear fruit

worthy of repentance. 9Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

10Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

11“‘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. 12His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

The Gospel of our Lord.

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

### **Interrupted**

Good morning! I have a story for you, but it’s important that you withhold judgment. I promise that my father is a much more caring person than he appears in today’s tale.

My sister became pregnant with my first nephew Brody at the end of 2009. She and her husband announced it to the family on Christmas Eve. Little Brody wasn’t due until the middle of August, and as things in life often are, after the initial changes and adjustments, life got back to its normal schedule. So, in August, when Brody was due, life went on, even though we knew his birth was soon.

August 14 was a Friday, and I know this because at work that week my father, my brother, and myself had decided to go to Drover's. Now, what you need to know about Drover's is that they have the best chicken wings in the country. What you're probably thinking is that they have some good chicken wings, but what I said was that they have the BEST chicken wings in the country! They're amazing, and we would travel 45 minutes to the middle of nowhere in Wellsburg, WV to enjoy them. So, the Crummitt men were going up to Drover's with some of Dad's friends. The end of work arrived, and then life was abruptly interrupted by a phone call.

Erin's water had broken... That's right, Brody was coming and all our plans were thrown out the window. Dad got off the phone and we looked around at each other. "No Drover's then?" we said. It was quiet for a moment, none of us wanted to admit that the birth was ruining our plans (let alone my sister's!). After a minute of silence, Dad spoke up. "I'm going!" he said, "She'll be hours before she gives birth, I'm going to Drover's." My brother and I were stunned... and then Rick decided that he would go, too. I decided to be the good brother and stay. I did this not because I knew for sure that Brody wouldn't be delivered, but because I had a healthy respect and fear of the wrath of my older sister, who just so happened to be a woman giving birth, a combination I didn't dare mess with.

Dad was right, they both made it the hospital with hours to spare before Brody finally showed up. The family laughs about it now, but it's strange how life can be interrupted so quickly, so easily. I mean, just think about the last time you went to the emergency room, chances are you didn't wake up that morning and plan on taking a last

minute visit to the hospital. (I certainly didn't when I cut my hand open a few months ago.)

In the season of Advent, we don't want an interruption, and yet that is exactly what John the Baptist does for us in today's reading. My favorite commentator, Douglas R. A. Hare (get used to hearing his name, cause we're in the Gospel of Matthew for the next year, and Hare's commentary is fantastic) writes that "*Advent has become almost exclusively preparation for Christmas, that is, a time of pondering the meaning of the incarnation. It was not so earlier. The four Sundays preceding the Feast of the Nativity focused attention on the awesome second coming of Christ as judge as well as on his first coming in humanity. It is wise to retain the twofold accent of Advent, lest our concentration on the Christmas baby become empty sentimentality void of awe.*"<sup>1</sup> It's the twofold accent of Advent that has been on my mind all week. Or rather, the way that John the Baptist seems to interrupt what we would consider the peace of the Advent season. As we think of "good will towards men", John calls some a "brood of vipers." At a time when we are preparing to sing silent night, John reminds us that one comes who has his winnowing fork in hand. As we gather with family and friends to sing songs of good cheer, John reminds us that God can raise up followers for Christ from the very stones of the ground.

As I was thinking about a metaphor for this interruption that John brings us, I thought about a bell. Not just any bell, but the one that is always ringing when we walk out of the store. That darn Salvation Army bell. We walk in to the store, buy whatever stuff we think we need, and as we walk out we're confronted with the ringing of a bell

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<sup>1</sup> Hare, Douglas R. *Matthew*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. pp. 19-20.

that reminds us that we're called to do so much more. That's why I think we get this rough and surprising text in the middle of a season where we're all looking for some peace and safety.

One commentator begins a section on this text with the title "*We do not want judgement at Advent.*"<sup>2</sup> And yet, that's exactly what we get! But I think I know why. How can we celebrate with family and friends when there are others who don't have family or friends that can give them a safe place? How can we sit in our homes singing carols when there are others who don't have homes in which to sing? If you're anything like me, you'll spend the holiday season putting on a few pounds, meanwhile there are those around us who will go on hungry.

Now, I'm not saying we can't enjoy the season of Advent and Christmas. For many of us it is a time of peace and happiness that we don't get any other time of the year. But I do think that God is reminding us through the words of John the Baptist, like a loud chiming bell, that we're called to more. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word. Year A. Vol. 1.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 44.