

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Second Sunday of Advent - Year C

92nd Sunday of Pandemic - Masked Service

Malachi 3:1-4

Luke 1:68-79

Philippians 1:3-11

Luke 3:1-6

12/05/2021

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

1In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, 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, 2during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4as 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. 5Every 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; 6and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

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

Amen

Why?

Good morning! As many of you know, I'm a big fan of J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. Published as three books, but always intended to be one. It's a huge story, spanning a journey that is roughly equivalent to walking from Indiana to Florida... and then back. We follow small hobbits, gruff dwarfs, elegant elves, old wizards, mighty men, and strong women in a fight to destroy the one ring. Early on in our story we find ourselves at Rivendell, at the Council of Elrond, as the people of Middle Earth discuss what to do with the ring. It's a very long section of the story, and a lot of people get bogged down when they read it. That's because it's roughly 30,000 words long... You heard me right, 30,000 words of just a group of people arguing about what to do with the ring. Talk about a long meeting! And you thought your Zoom meetings went too long! For context, I try to keep my sermons around 1,200 words, which usually puts me around the 10-12 minute mark. The council of Elrond is 25 times longer than my average sermon.

Now, while many of us are familiar with the Hobbit or Lord of the Rings, far fewer have read Tolkien's other work, the Silmarillion. It was published after his death by his son who did the final editing. It's a sort of history and compilation of stories spanning thousands of years. Now, here's the crazy part. The entire events of the Lord of the Rings only encompass roughly 2 pages of the book. All those thousands of words? Not even mentioned. All the little details we love from the story are just little blips in the larger narrative. It can make you feel small...

Here's something else about time that blows my mind. If you took the entirety of existence, all the time that the universe has existed, all the millions and billions of years of space, and you make that block of time equivalent to one mile, the amount of time that human beings have existed would only be the last little inch. One whole mile, that's roughly from here

at St. Paul's to the Target store down the street, one whole mile and the length of time that human beings have walked around is only the last little inch. Like I said, it makes you feel small. Tiny.

Will the span of my life even be measurable? I'm just one person. John the Baptist was just one person too. Do you think all those important people that our Gospel story lists at the beginning were even aware of the ministry of one guy in the wilderness?

I was talking with some friends this week who, to put it simply, seemed dejected. Looking at the state of the world around them they could find very little that inspired hope. Of course the recent shooting in Michigan was on our minds. Where one 15 year old boy killed four and injured 6 classmates at Oxford High School.¹ In the face of such darkness, what can we do?

Well, we can stand together. If one 15 year old can cause so much pain, then one of us can certainly bring great joy. John the Baptist makes the same stand. John was not the Messiah, and he knew that. But that did not stop John from proclaiming the word of God. John wouldn't even live to see the full ministry of Jesus Christ, and yet he refused to let that stop him from being the voice in the wilderness, of one calling out, "make straight the path."

John's ministry happens outside, not in the temple, which is an interesting detail. John's father Zechariah is a temple priest and John's mother is a descendant of Aaron, the family charged with priestly duties. It would make sense that John would follow the "family" business and work at what was considered the religious center for all Jews. And yet, he doesn't.

¹<https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/01/us/oxford-high-school-shooting-what-we-know/index.html>

It's a wonderful reminder for us that the church building is not where ministry happens. While worship and gathering together are important, it's outside these walls where ministry truly happens. And it's not the ordained person doing it either! While John comes from priestly heritage, he is just a person in the wilderness, a human being trying to listen to the call of God.

The season of Advent is a time of expectation, of crying out to make straight the pathway. Advent is the time of people like John the Baptist, of those who work to prepare the way. It's the time of you and me. Because God is working to change the world, and for some strange reason, God has chosen you and me to do just that! It's a humbling reminder that, as Audrey West writes, "*Luke's Gospel proclaims: [that] God does not remain distant from the world. God's reign enters time and space on the stage of world history...*"² In the span of existence, my life might not be much on that mile, but to God, I'm one of the most precious things that have ever been created. Just as John was chosen to do God's work, we too are beloved and chosen! John the Baptist does work that he will never see finished... why? Because he works to make the world a better place for those who come after him! Why? Because God has chosen him to do this work! Why? Because no matter how small we might feel, Christ is coming, and we have been given the honor of serving. That's why. Amen.

²<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-of-advent-3/commentary-on-luke-31-6-5>