

Pastor T.C. Arnold
4th Sunday in Advent
John 1:19-28
December 22nd, 2013

It's a "do it yourself" and "make a name for yourself" kind of world. Self-promotion is the way to go – it's even expected. How else are you going to get ahead? How else will you get noticed? There is so much competition – even for our children, i.e. athletics, drama, music, academics... Life is "cut-throat" – so we are told we either kill or be killed.

In the light of the Gospel reading for today – John the Baptizer takes the opposite approach. Instead of making a name for himself, instead of shameless self-promotion, John promotes someone else as he heralds a confession of inferiority. With three humble negatives John disclaims all distinction that he has a great name. He admitted freely, "*I am not the Christ.*" "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "*I am not.*" "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "*No.*" All three times he took his name out of the running for the "Messiah" position by speaking clearly who he is not. **I am not Christ, I am not Elijah, and I am not the Prophet.**

Beloved, as we are so very close to Christmas – decorations adorning the altar – yet the color of violet remains. It's somewhat strange to be in church so close to Christmas and still be in the season of Advent. It's strange but that's how it is. Last week John the Baptizer asks a strange question. He told his disciples from jail to go ask Jesus, "*Are you the Christ or shall we be on the look-out for another yet to come?*" A strange question because we think of a man like John as having such an unwavering faith that cannot be shaken "*like a reed in the wind*" – as we heard last week. And this week John does yet another strange thing. Not that telling the truth is strange – but to do the opposite so animatedly can seem to us as being strange. In this age of being called to self-promote – get ahead by any means possible – John calls out loudly – I am not a celebrated man.

Look at what John does – his office is inferior. He thinks of himself not as a speaker but rather as a voice. The message that comes from him is to be heard – it matters not who it is that is saying such things. He thinks of himself not as a messenger but as a message. He regards his Baptism as merely preparatory; there is need for a more perfect cleaning. He looks upon himself as unworthy to perform the service of a slave to the coming Master. His work was humble duty of preparation, and the need for even that had passed, for the Christ was standing among them though they knew it not. His own final message was about to be delivered, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

I'll say it again; John reacts in a manner than is totally foreign to the way the world tells us to act if we want to get ahead. I would say, beloved in the Lord, to get ahead in our world today – we don't need to self-promote and raise ourselves above others. I'm not saying, don't work hard to get ahead. No, work hard – but the getting ahead part will come naturally. I'm saying, don't work to get ahead of your neighbor at the expense of our own integrity and the good name of our neighbor. Rather than making ourselves look good by making others look bad, put others first in service. In all that we do, point not at ourselves – but for the greater good for why we do such a thing – for the reason why we live the way we live – for the reason why we believe the way we believe – for the reason why we trust our Lord the way we do.

To look at the very opposite of what John was doing and what we as Christians are called to do – the Pharisees wanted to know more about John. That was just like those Pharisees – you see – they thought they had it all figured out from the start. They thought that you can only see God through the workings of the Law and they were the guardians of such things – they were the ones to go through in order to get to God. So, they grilled John with questions...

And John would tell them – it's not about me. It's about Him who comes. It's all about Jesus. I am a speaker not the voice. I am the messenger not the message. John was called to give testimony to the one to come.

You see, when it's not "only" Jesus, then we have a problem. When it's more than just Jesus we are looking for we can easily forget that it's "only" Jesus that matters. Today, for example – what is it that matters most about Christmas? What is it that means the most to you? As a kid – it was presents. That seems like a given. For us as adults – getting the family together, having a party, maybe getting off work. Yes those are all good things, but not the reason itself. Those "type" of things only call us to mind of something greater – they are not the meaning of Christmas in and of themselves.

Here is something to think about – to take to heart – this is what John is communicating. Christ stands among you today. Not just on the 4th Sunday of Advent, but every day. Every day is a day in the Lord. Every single moment is a time that can be used to glorify Him and to live in His presence. And though we have so much to occupy ourselves today and this week, it is His unseen presence that to be put in the forefront of our lives today. Without Christ, there are no presents. Without Christ, there are no parties. Without Christ, there are no celebrations. We sometimes fail to see that at the root of it all, at the very center is Christ. Within the hustle and bustle of yet another Christmas Season, Jesus gets pushed aside and all the worries of getting things done and making sure everything is organized takes its place.

So right now – relax in the Lord's House. Let Him feed you with His gifts. Not only today but tomorrow as well. Let us not be so concerned about who this John is like the Pharisees. He's not even concerned about himself. He points rather to Christ. That's a great lesson for all of us during this Season of Advent and Christmas. Take the time to help people see the baby in the manger. Take the time to share the message.

Today – as we are told by the world to make a name for ourselves – we as Christians do the very opposite. We make a name for Christ Jesus our Lord. We step aside, we do everything to His glory and we concern ourselves with His coming for us in the manger. Like the angel sang to the Shepherd's in the field, like the guiding star in the East for the Magi, like the Baptizer calling from the wilderness pointing us to a Baptism in Christ that saves – Jesus stands among us as the only one to be glorified. And as we glorify Him, He came to us in a way that was anything but glorious. He came to us as a child. He came to glorify us. He did just that on Good Friday when He took every one of our sins to the cross with Him. He came and He comes. That's Advent for us today. Beloved in the Lord, that will see its total consummation on Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning in our worship together. Come and worship with us – the new born King. Christ the Lord. We will make His name known to all. We will make a name for Him. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen