

Pastor T.C. Arnold
3rd Sunday in Advent
Isaiah 40:1-8
December 17th, 2017

“Hark! A thrilling **voice** is sounding! ‘Christ is near’ we here it say. “Cast away the works of darkness, all you children of the day.”

“A **voice** cries: In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight the desert highway for our God.”

A baby hears the sound of its mother’s voice and is immediately comforted. Children hear a loud “Ho, ho, ho!” and know that Santa is close and they get excited. Adults hear the words “Big Sale, everything half off” and we go crazy. Sometimes it’s the sound the voice makes. Sometimes it is the one who is making the sound. But in the hymn verse and in the Old Testament text for today, the person who is the thrilling voice which is sounding or the voice that cries in the wilderness is truly inconsequential. We know who it was. It’s John the Baptizer, the object of the Gospel text for today. But the voice could have been anyone. The voice could have been you or me.

We know the name of the voice in the text. But what the voice cries out is so much more important. And so, even though John the Baptizer, this very important, yet very eccentric figure at the very beginning of the New Testament was appointed as “the crier,” it really didn’t matter that it was him. He even mentions that it doesn’t matter that it is him. He points away from himself and toward the Christ when he says, “*Behold* (imagine him pointing), *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*” All eyes turn from “the voice” who cries out telling everyone who the Christ is, and toward the Savior Himself. The voice does not draw acclamation toward himself. No, it calls out that this is the one who “*comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.*” Everything is pointing to Jesus. Everyone has their eyes on Jesus. That’s exactly where they should be.

Here’s the problem. People today want to be “The Voice.” Those two words have even become a nation-wide television competition. Don’t get me wrong, this world needs voices. The world needs to hear the truth and the only way the world will hear is if people speak up and use their voices. But “The Voice” and the way so many Americans use their voice today is not to point out someone else... “*Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*” No, rather, they use their voice to show themselves. Hear my voice, and look at me. Here my voice and choose me. And even beyond competition, today people speak loudly about individual rights, what matters most to me, and why what I have to say is so much more important than what you have to say, to the point where community and what we have in common doesn’t even matter anymore.

Here is the problem of the tyranny of individualism. The absurd becomes the norm because we ignore the opinions of those who are close to us and who love us if they happen to disagree, and show us clearly how we are wrong. Family is no longer the primary establishment to show care, love, support, and to share truth because the idea of autonomy, what truth I have for myself, trumps the values perpetrated through the family institution. Here is what I am saying, the further we get away from the family, the more our voices turn in on ourselves. The more we care only about us, the individual. The more that Jesus is not the subject of the voice crying out in the wilderness, but rather only injustices that threaten autonomy.

Let’s be clear. No one is against competition... like “The Voice.” Competition is all about showing off our skills and showing what we can do. But more important than that is what we are as a community of believers. Beloved, you cannot see this church as something you do, a place you go

to, that is just one part of the greater whole that is your life. Together we are a family from this altar that is united in Jesus Christ with God almighty as our head. You see, everything for your life must flow from here out into the world. This is not “a part” of your life. This is the foundation for your life. Community with truth and love in common is what the world is missing right now. We have to reestablish it. If we don’t, the world will continue down this destructive path and eventually fall beyond repair. Some would say we have already made it past that point.

At the funeral of former President Ronald Reagan, one speaker reminded the congregation of a quote that Reagan shared about the importance of marriage and the family. He said, “Strong families are the foundation of society. Through them we pass on our traditions, rituals, and values. From them we receive the love, encouragement, and education needed to meet human challenges. Family life provides opportunities and time for spiritual growth that fosters generosity of spirit and responsible citizenship. I don’t believe you can have a strong and healthy nation without the family unit at its very base. For as the family goes, so also will go the nation.” So whether it is mom or dad, grandpa or grandma, or maybe someone else who is part of the family, “the voice that cries out” does not call out about self in order to divide and separate and spark a controversy of differences. No, the voice calls out to show how we are brought together under the same banner of life, hope, faith and truth.

So be the voice crying in the wilderness. The point is that it doesn’t matter “who” the voice is. What matters is what the voices says... what it points to. Share the truth in love in this desert which is void of truth and even more so at times, good common sense. The world that we see explained on the news, written about on social media is absolutely absurd. How do we put absurdity that goes against truth to rest? This is how... we become the voice who cries out in the wilderness pointing toward the truth.

I’ve heard someone call Advent the “Rodney Dangerfield” Church-year seasons. It gets no respect. As soon as we get into the season of Advent we are already looking past it to Christmas. Advent even seems shorter this year because the last Sunday in Advent is Christmas Eve. And, we only have three midweek Advent Services instead of four. Yet Advent is important and essential. The Advent “Hark the Herald” or as we heard today, “Hark! A Thrilling Voice is Sounding,” of the coming Lord... Advent shows us that the voice has something important to say and something even more important to show us.

The Advent message is that of John the Baptizer. The Advent message is that of Mary who cries out when her cousin Elizabeth greets her and says, “*My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...*” Advent spreads the message of John’s father, the priest Zechariah, who says about His Savior, “*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people...*” These are voices that point in the appropriate direction. The one who speaks is nowhere near as important as the one of whom the voice is about.

So call out, beloved in the Lord. Our King is coming. He comes. And He will come again!! Let the voice be your voice. You are John, Mary, and Zechariah. You are God’s precious children sharing truth to a lost world. You have a faith that binds us together as a family founded on the foundation of Jesus Christ our Lord. Everything we are and we do blossoms from this place in your life. It is here we see the manger. It is here we see Christ’s Holy Work for His people. It is here we see Calvary, the open tomb, and heaven opened to us. It is here we receive Him and where He calls us His own. That voice from the Word is the voice of Jesus. He has something special to tell you. He loves you, He forgives you and He calls you His own. Amen.

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