

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

John is not a baptist by denomination, but a baptist by way of description of his mission.

He is in the wilderness, the desert, the place nobody chooses to live. But he has drawn crowds of people out into the middle of nowhere with his demand that they start over again.

They are not so sure of the need because, after all, this crowd is a Jewish crowd. They think they are all set just by who they are...as the Lord's favored people, they think they can just skate by. But, after being over the top with them...calling them a brood of vipers, and warning them of the axe and the fire...they sense that the label of heritage is not enough, that they need something more. So, they accept at the hands of this wild-eyed prophet a baptism of repentance....with him insisting that their plunge into the river is not the end of their striving, but only the start.

What he wants to see are lives that have been transformed. Lives tuned into a different frequency than they were before. But before that can happen, his hearers need to do some personal spiritual work. God gives all the time...but we humans need to be ready to receive. So, John is saying to these people that they have some work to do...starting with the baptism of repentance. And he gets them good and scared, to the point that the crowd, including the tax collectors and the soldiers, ask the question, "What should we do?" What should we do in advance of the One who is coming?

And, here we are...2000 plus years later. Everything may seem different at first. Instead of being in the desert on the bank of the river, we gather on an early winter day in this beautiful, comfortable church. I am not wearing burlap, but instead the finest vestments of this parish, with you are surrounded by polished brass and stained glass.

But, while on the surface our experience today may seem grossly different from John's, consider otherwise....because, after all, we are in the Season of Advent. The season of our spiritual Adventure. And, again, it is no coincidence that, at the heart of it all in Advent, we individually and collectively pray and ponder and wait for the Holy One who is Coming. Getting ready for Jesus to come among us.

In proclaiming the coming of God's Kingdom, John does not try to make their lives easy....but instead invites them to make to make adjustments so their lives will be holy. And what about us...two thousand years later? What do we want....easy, or holy? Like his prophet John, God does not care about roots, but God does care passionately about the fruit of one's life. We want our lives made easy, but should be looking for lives made holy.

In the anticipation for the coming of the Holy One, we can think further about the youngest of the dearest loved ones among us. Our youngest infants, particularly those who come...in the shadow of this gospel reading about baptism by John. What about them?

They are too young and innocent to have to make adjustments so their lives will be holy. But the loving parents, and god parents, and the other people who surround them with their love bring them before God anyway.

Because we each know, in the depth of their hearts, that while we would give or do anything for the babies among us...we still will need God's help and blessings in the raising of our children into the real fullness of their humanity.

The adults among us still need God's help so that we may help our babies grow with the understanding of heart and presence into the very image of God. To help bring them into being persons of conspicuous fruitfulness. Conspicuous fruitfulness.

"So, you believe in me?", God asks. "What are you going to do about it? Live the life and perform the deeds worthy of a repentant people, of a fruitful people. Look around. Find a need and fill it! Become people of conspicuous fruitfulness."

The Christ we serve was not simply born long ago in Bethlehem. He is present not only in the words of Scripture and in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar. Christ comes into the circumstances of each new day when we repent and leave ourselves open to how he would use us in the world; when we put aside preoccupation with roots and endeavor to bear abundant fruits; when for the love of God, we find a need and fill it, even as Christ did in deciding to come among us.

Jesus as the Christ still looks to be alive in the world...alive and active through us. May we join with others in this time and season of focusing on family and friends by living lives worthy of repentant people...in seeking and finding the ways that God wishes for us to grow into our conspicuous fruitfulness.

All in the name of the loving and sustaining God...known to us in the person of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.