

Hope: Repairing What's Broken

Luke 3: 1-16

Do this part first!

Our theme for Advent is “Making Room at the Manger”. When I googled this phrase just to see what was out there, a lot of stuff came up for “making room for the manger” but this didn’t quite capture where my thoughts were going.

In my mind, “making room for the manger” means making room for the presence of God in our lives during a busy season. Once again, appropriate for the season but not sure this is the conversation we need to really be having as people of faith right now. Don’t get me wrong. There is always a need to create room in our lives and in our hearts for God, especially when so much clamors for our attention.

But the danger with this way of thinking is that it can easily start leading to a me and Jesus mindset, leaving out all others. It allows us to put blinders on, preventing us from seeing the larger world around us, which goes against so many of the stories about Jesus. In reading the stories of our sacred text, especially the Gospels, we notice is that Jesus transcended boundaries. He gathered all the people

to him. He invited both sinner and saint alike to break bread with him. Jesus brought all people together as one.

This is what the gift of the manger still does for us today. It gathers us to Jesus. It invites us all to partake in this holy moment together, interacting, embracing people who are different from us. It calls us to open our hearts to God's transformative love.

Think about it...in one of the most holy, sacred moments for us as people of faith, we see shepherds, dirty, unaccepted people who are kneeling beside an unwed mother who is kneeling beside a man who is trying to do the best he can for his family. All of them have been brought together by the baby lying in the manger.

Or as one person put it..."[The story of] Christ's birth, the story of [the manger] reminds us of the choices we have when facing our neighbors. Yes, it's easier to declare "no room in the inn," especially for the unruly, the burdened and destitute. But when we make up our mind to find space at the manger [for all of God's people], the true face of Christ has the opportunity to emerge."

So each week as we travel through Advent, we will take a closer look at the people who make up our manger scene. We will meet people who challenge us. We will meet people who make us uncomfortable. We will meet people who open our eyes to God's grace and love so that as we take a closer look at the manger

scene, we will begin to see the very Kingdom of God unfolding right before our eyes.

This week, we are adding John the Baptist to the scene. Sure, he is not typically in the manger scenes which decorate our mantels or other places of honor. But we would be missing out on something wonderful if we didn't at least hear what he has to say as he helps us begin preparing for the coming of our Lord.

So now Let us hear from John the Baptist...Read text

We are told in first Corinthians that God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are..." With these words, Paul reminds us that God chooses to work through the weak, the despised, the voiceless, the poor, even choosing to work through ordinary everyday people like you and me, to bring about healing and wholeness for all of God's people.

Which brings us to the Luke text where we meet this wild and crazy guy named John the Baptist. Now before we even meet this guy, we have to wade

through a list of who's who in power at that time, leaving us to wonder about the meaning behind this long list.

As people of faith, we need to understand that Luke is not unique in adding lists of who's who in power at the time of his writing. Many of the Old Testament Books, especially the prophets have the same thing. These lists add context. They help us understand that during a specific time and place God was at work, bringing salvation for God's people.

So for example if Luke was writing his Gospel today, his list of who's who in power would go something like this, "In the first year of Donald Trump's presidency, when Paul Ryan was Speaker of the House, Mitch McConnell was Senate Majority Leader, when Matt Bevin was Governor of Kentucky, Grayson Vandegrift was mayor of Midway and when Francis was Pope..." Please hear me say that Luke is not calling out these leaders in his list of who's who. That is not what Luke wants us to notice. Luke wants us to see that the story of God is never separated from the larger political and historical scene of the world".

As we look at this context of the larger political and historical scene of the world, Luke reminds us that God is always about to do a new thing for the people of God, that no matter what this world may say, God will never stop working to

bring about salvation for God's people. Now this is where John the Baptist comes in.

Notice that after this long list of rulers, governors, and religious leaders, we are told that the word of God came to a guy out in the wilderness. This should be our first clue that God is about to do a new thing because you see "God chose a nobody to prepare the way for God's son to come among us, keeping with the pattern of God regularly choosing "people whom this world sees as insignificant to bring about a miraculous thing."

This miraculous thing all starts with a prophetic call. John the Baptist is to become the voice for voiceless, going out among the people, calling for them to repent. Look at some of things he tells the people to do....Common sense stuff really...Share coats with those who don't have any. Share food with those who are hungry. Don't take advantage of the poor. Love your neighbors. Treat others with kindness. Make justice for the weak and vulnerable. Seems like we've heard all this stuff before.

John the Baptist is calling for the people to repair what is broken in their midst and in doing so, give people hope that one day, God's Kingdom will reign here on Earth as it does in Heaven

John's message then and now is that the Lord is coming. Let us prepare our hearts for his arrival by fixing what is broken in our world, you know like dismantling the unjust systems of oppression or maybe reducing the constant need for power and greed in our world. John reminds us that the Lord is coming. Now is the time for us as his followers to become a voice for the voiceless by shouting a prophetic word, a prophetic word that calls for everyone, young and old, rich and poor, those who are in power and those who do not have nay, this prophetic word calls for all of God's people to come together and make all the rough ways smooth so that all flesh will see the salvation of God.

Or let me say it this way... in the words of Dorothy Day, words that rang for John the Baptist back then and still ring true for us today...*“The greatest challenge of the day is: [not us striving for more and more power in this world. It is how to bring about a revolution of the heart, [a revolution that makes our hearts open to the very presence of God in our midst, knowing that we as people of God are called to make justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God. This] revolution of the heart has to start with each one of us”* [so that all of God's people will be made whole, released from the chains of power and poverty.]

Today, on this first Sunday of Advent, with a prophetic voice, John the Baptist breaks into peaceful our manger scene, reminding us that the task of

[repairing the broken systems of our world] so that all can indeed have hope is not one we as people of faith should ever, ever neglect.” It is our call. It is how we prepare the way for the Lord. So today and all days, let us make room at the manger for all of God’s children by repairing what’s broken, giving all a glimmer of hope that one day God’s Kingdom will reign here on earth as it does in heaven. Amen.