

“Behold, I Will Send You Elijah”

John 1:6-8, 19-28

So far, this Advent season, we have taken an extra-close look at John the Baptist and his role as the Advent prophet. Our Gospel reading today is a portion of what I read this past Wednesday at our mid-week service. On Wednesday, we focused on John being “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’” He was the “voice” which would not be silent.

This, of course, was a follow-up to the first Wednesday service where John was a silent witness – in the womb of his mother Elizabeth. Even in silence, he bore witness to the coming of Jesus – he even leaped for joy in his mother’s womb when he heard the voice of Mary, the mother of our Lord.

It is for this reason he came – to bear witness about the light. He Himself was not the light, and John goes out of his way to make this clear, even though the crowd doesn’t want to listen to him.

Like I said on Wednesday, “The crowd, like most crowds, was excited by the buzz of what is going on at that moment, they were not interested in really listening to what John was saying. They wanted him to be somebody. Little did they know that the

“somebody” they were wanting to know about was standing among them. So they ask John, well then, “who are you? What do you say about yourself?” John wasn’t there to say anything about himself.

John tells them about the Messiah who is coming. He already stands among you. The people hear these words and want to know if John is the Messiah – to which he emphatically says, “No.” Clearly, the crowd is not listening to what is actually being said. If you read all of chapter 1 in John’s Gospel, there is a strong indictment of the Jews – Jesus, the Light of the world is revealed to them and they did not receive Him.

We look around and nothing has really changed. The crowd wants to talk about God. The crowd wants to think that they are all right with the Lord, but the crowd only wants to believe about God what it wants to believe. And the crowd does not really want to listen to the finer details of what God has said in His Word and continues to say through His church on earth.

So after John once again tells them that He is not the Christ, they ask him, “Are you Elijah?” Again, “No.” Even though Jesus tells us later that John was the one who came in the spirit of Elijah, and the angel of the Lord who told John’s father Zechariah of John’s birth said that he would come in the spirit and power of Elijah, however, John doesn’t want to distract his hearers from the focus of his message. In the previous 400 years or so, since

Malachi basically closed the Old Testament saying, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes,” there were all sorts of myths and urban legends about Elijah which had worked their way into the popular culture.

A prime example of this, I mentioned it on Wednesday, is seen with Jesus on the cross when He says, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachtani” which means, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” The crowd says, “He’s calling for Elijah.” No, he is quoting the first line of Psalm 22. However, the crowd wanted to believe He was calling for Elijah because there was this urban myth among the Jews that, if you were being wrongfully punished, you could call upon Elijah and Elijah would come and rescue you.

So the crowd is expecting Jesus to call for Elijah to come. And when He doesn’t come, they can say, “It seems He was a sinner after all.” The reality is that Elijah had already come – not the urban myth Elijah; the real Elijah. John had come to do what God had said Elijah was going to do, but then again, the crowd never wants to listen to the finer details of what God has to say.

John comes in the spirit and power of Elijah. However, John does not want anyone to know this, because John’s ministry was not for the purpose of drawing attention to himself. He had one purpose – “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’”

He goes even farther. He tells them, not only am I not the Christ, the Messiah, but I am not even worthy to untie the strap of His sandal. This is more than just John making a comparison as to how much better, more powerful, more important the Messiah is. John is announcing the Christ to be the Redeemer.

He is the One who will buy you back from your slavery to sin. He is the One who will purchase your freedom at a great price. He is the One who will restore you back into the family of God.

That is what John is alluding to with his comment about not being worthy to untie the strap of the Redeemer's sandals. The best example of this is seen in the book of Ruth when Boaz fulfills his duty as the kinsman-redeemer, buys the land, marries Ruth, and continues her dead husband's family tree. To make this transaction complete, in the presence of the elders of the city, Boaz takes off his sandal. That is how the redeemer was identified. John says, "I am not worthy to stoop down and untie His sandals."

John the Baptist has come to identify the Redeemer. He says, "I am not the Redeemer. I am not the Messiah. I came to bear witness about the Light of the World. But I am not the Light. The Light is coming. The Redeemer is coming. The Messiah, the Christ is coming. It will not be long until John, the voice in the wilderness, cries out, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Amen.