

“I am the Voice”

Isaiah 40:1-11; Revelation 6:9-11; John 1:19-34

As we continue looking at the life of John the Baptist this Advent Season, last week, John was silent in the womb of his mother Elizabeth. But John was called as a prophet of God with one purpose. He was to proclaim the coming of the Messiah. We have heard that even while in his mother’s womb, John leaped for joy when he heard the voice of Mary, the mother of our Lord.

But it was not until John went out into the wilderness of the Jordan River valley that his voice would be heard. And it was heard. In our Gospel reading from last Sunday, Mark tells that all of Jerusalem and all the country of Judea were going out to hear him.

And his message must have been very powerful. Not only to draw people out into the wilderness to hear him, but for Jews to be baptized – that was unheard of. Within the Jewish religious life, Gentiles could be baptized as a part

of the ritual for those who desired to become worshipers of the Living God and worship as the Jews did. But John preached a different and infinitely more powerful message than the rabbis and Pharisees of that day. Yet, by his own admission, he was not worthy to stoop down and untie the sandals of the One who was to come.

John's entire message was all about the one who was coming, and his words were solely meant to prepare the way of the Lord. All the people came out to hear him. Crowds of people were confessing their sins and were being baptized. Again, John tells them about the Messiah who is coming. The people hear these words and want to know if John is the Messiah – to which he emphatically says, "No." And 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. 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.’”

But 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. So they ask him, well then, “who are you? What do you say about yourself?” John wasn’t there to say anything about himself. He answers with the words of Isaiah. He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’”

John would not be silent, but he would say no more about himself. He came to proclaim the Christ. And it is when Jesus arrives on the banks of the Jordan River that John fulfills his calling and announces the Christ. He cries out for all of them to hear, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

John would not be silent, and John is not silent to this day. He is still the voice of one crying out. His words are regularly repeated in our Sunday worship.

We sing those words in the Agnus Dei and the Gloria in Excelsis – “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” And as we hear in the Book of Revelation, the souls of those who have been slain for the Word of God and for the witness they had borne cry out with a loud voice and ask God how long before He comes to judge and avenge their blood. As we know, John’s ministry will end with the spilling of His blood for refusing to remain silent. He would never stop crying out the truth of the Word of God.

And each year during the season of Advent, we hear “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord.’”

How did John prepare the people? He preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. We heard this on Sunday. You are prepared for the coming of the Lord. Why? Don’t look inside of you for the answer. Look to your Baptism. Listen the Word of God. God has spoken to you with the voice of Scripture. Listen to that voice and be confident that God has prepared you for the coming of the Lord. Amen.