

"What's New"

Isaiah 11:1-10 & Matthew 3:1-12

December 5, 2010

It is another Sunday morning in Advent. We hear familiar scriptures like our first lesson from the prophet Isaiah about wolves and lambs coexisting in peace - wonderful stuff about the possibility of what life might hold in God's kingdom. And then there is John the Baptist in the Gospel text calling respected religious leaders a 'brood of vipers' while standing on the banks of a river in his camel hair lion cloth. We hear those familiar old scriptures ... And we don't flinch. It is all so strange and surreal that it should capture our attention but it doesn't because we have heard it too many times before and just dismiss it as ancient Bible stories that we just don't require us to listen too closely. We believe But it doesn't really connect for us. I have wondered if maybe we would pay more attention if we put the whole thing in a more modern context with John talking to a group of well respected community leaders from Bottineau standing in the snow in their suits and ties while he is clinging to his snow board with a beer in one hand while talking in a rap beat - not at all concerned that his jeans are hanging way too low. 'Yo ... ya'll brood of vips Let me tell you what's going down'

Maybe something like that would get us to perk up But I don't know for sure. We might take one look at the modern day John the 'B' and say, 'ya, sure Funny stuff But now lets get back to that cup of coffee.' I wonder if in our fast paced, information packed, incredible world where everything has become ordinary, if anything really has the power to move us or change us?

There is a story told of a woman who got out of bed one sunny morning and looked out her living room window only to be amazed to discover that there was a dead mule on her lawn. Immediately she called the sanitation department, told them of her situation, and asked them to come and remove the carcass. But by the time the work-crew arrived, she had changed her mind. She gave the men \$100.00 each, instructing them to carry the mule upstairs and to deposit it in the bathtub. A hundred bucks is good money so, even though they thought she must be crazy they did as she had requested. After they finished following her instructions, one of the workers asked why she wanted the dead mule in her bathtub. She said, "Well, for 35 years my husband has been coming home at night, throwing his coat on the rack, grabbing the newspaper, plops into the easy chair, turns on the TV and opens the paper and only then asks, 'What's new?', without ever really caring about or listening to my response. Well, tonight, all of that's going to change."

A voice cries out in the wilderness for us to prepare the way of the Lord. Our God comes to change the world. And what a change it will be - peace where there has only been warfare and destruction - harmony where there has always been conflict - hope where there has only been despair. Will you sit up and take notice of such a possibility? Will you do what it

takes in order to prepare for this to come? Will you change your life, get out of your ruts and walk with God?

There is a great little story that the evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, used to tell. It was a legend about a beautiful swan that landed by the banks of a lake on which a crane was wading about seeking snails. For a few moments the crane viewed the swan in wonder having never seen a beautiful swan before. And then inquired: "Where do you come from?" "I come from heaven!" replied the swan. "And where is heaven?" asked the crane. "Heaven!" said the swan, "Heaven - have you never heard of heaven?" And the beautiful bird went on to describe the grandeur of the Eternal City. She told of streets of gold, and the gates and walls made of precious stones; of the river of life, pure as crystal, upon whose banks is the tree whose leaves shall be for the healing of the nations. In eloquent terms the swan sought to describe the hosts who live in the other world, but without arousing the slightest interest on the part of the crane. Finally the crane asked: "Are there any snails there?" "Snails!" repeated the swan, "No! Of course there are not." "Then," said the crane, as it looked away continuing its search along the slimy banks of the pool, "you can have your heaven. I want snails!"

I want snails. I want to sit in my easy chair and read the paper. I want to get on with life that way I know and understand it. It is amazing to note that some people will simply endure terribly difficult things in their lives and just stay in it rather than do anything to make a change. But John the Baptist comes to sound the call. Something really great is coming get up and prepare the way. Prepare the way because the Savior comes to bring harmony and hope - a world at peace.

Those are really amazing things - hope, harmony and peace. We talked about hope on Wednesday evening at our Advent Service. It was almost universally agreed that hope is one of the most important and necessary things that we all long for and need in our world today. And what is it that we hope for? And I am not asking about the long Christmas lists or all of the stuff that we get up at 3:00 AM to get in line for on Black Friday that we don't really need. I am asking about that which we all really long for in our lives ... in our relationships ... in our world. Certainly there is a very deep and real desire for jobs for the unemployed and under employed. There are the very real desires for health for those who struggle with health issues. Yet beyond those individual needs it seems to me that what we want most in our lives is to be able to live in harmony and peace with one another. I may be wrong and I would certainly invite anyone to share with me any different thoughts that you have.

In the midst of street riots some years ago, one man simply asked, "Can't we just all get along?" That desperate man's question almost seemed to become a folk legend. And yet it seems that too often the answer is no. There is precious little peace of harmony in our world. And so we just sit back in our easy chairs, read the paper and bemoan the state of the world without hearing the call to sit up to take notice of our world and do something about it.

John the Baptist comes to call us to take notice ... to repent and change our lives because someone remarkable is coming. Isaiah, the prophet paints the picture of what can happen in the presence of that one who would come to save.

So the question is whether or not we will actually hear John the Baptist this year? There is a dead mule in your bath tub ... now will you do something. I truly believe that if we can learn to walk with the Savior who comes to us - we will find a harmony and peace that we may not have even thought was possible. Do we really want it? Or are we content with snails and bemoaning the state of the world?

The Apostle Paul said it well "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

AMEN