

Sermon Text for December 8, 2019

by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

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

“Not the kind of Jesus that you would expect.”

For preschool chapel this past week we acted out the Christmas story, you know the one where Mary and Joseph ride into Bethlehem to find a place to stay. I have the kids act it out and they knocked on the door and I forgot the story a little bit and I said at the first house they knocked and no one was home, at the second house they knocked and no one was home. At this time I realized, that is not at all how the story goes. It wasn't that people aren't home, it is that people say purposefully that no, there is no room and you cannot stay with us. I got it right at the third place where they stayed.

The Jesus that we read about, the Jesus that we think about, the Jesus that we tell stories about is a gentle, meek, born in a manger Jesus who was born to poor parents and who became an immigrant hiding from danger in his home country and went into Egypt with his family. The Jesus we expect this time of the year is a Jesus who elicits warm and fuzzy feelings while creating an introspection of what it means when we say that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Advent is a time for pondering the incarnation. But Jesus is not whom we have focused on in these last two Sundays. While we have pondered on the grace and the mercy and the hope that comes in the king and in the second coming, the Jesus we find in these Scriptures is one who is not meek or gentle or humble or even, some would say kind.

It is wise to retain the twofold accent of Advent, judgment and humility, otherwise our concentration on the Christmas baby become empty sentimentality void of awe. We must not speak of God's love coming down at Christmas without remembering the divine love is fierce in its judgment of those who resist love's demands. We can't wait to repent, we read today, or it will be too late.

These past three Sundays we prepared ourselves on Christ the King Sunday by discovering a king that we would not expect, and one who expects a lot from us. Last Sunday as we saw a second coming which we would not expect. Today, a Jesus we would not expect, a Savior whom we must know personally and not just a protagonist in a really neat story. Let's read.

READ

One of the most iconic figures of Advent is John the Baptist. I think that probably every single year that I have been a pastor during Advent I have preached at least one sermon on him. Over and over again as we look at him the principal theme is not that John the Baptist was the man, but as he says over and over again, someone better and more important than him is going to be coming. All that John does points to the one who is going to be coming. In vs.2 we read the kingdom of God was coming and this kingdom is a he, the one whom Isaiah spoke about, and now today, the one that John the Baptist spoke about. As he states in vs.11 Jesus is “one who is more powerful than I am.”

But it is still fun to talk about John the Baptist, one of my favorite characters in the Bible. He is not the Gospel writer whose name was also John. He wore camel hair and had a leather belt and ate locust and wild honey and he lived in the wilderness. Are you getting the picture? Kind of what a lot of our men in this church looked like this past week as they were out in the woods hunting. II Kings 1:8 describes Elijah as a hairy man with a leather belt around his waist. So yeah, pretty much the same guy.

I'm convinced that he lived in the community that housed the dead sea scrolls in Qumran called the Essenes. There are too many overlapping facts that point to John the Baptist being an Essene. He was considered so much of a threat by Herod that he had him arrested and then eventually killed. He had the charisma and message of Billy Graham and he drew people to him as Billy Graham did, even as we saw those that many would consider his and Jesus' enemies, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. His message was unwavering and the same for everyone who came and saw him. Repent. Repent now because tomorrow may be too late. The day is coming when you won't have the time to do it later on.

But today is about Jesus. Jesus whose name means God saves. When we look at Isaiah we read about a shoot of Jesse, remember Jesse was the father of David and we know that the Messiah is always in the family line of David, so Isaiah is speaking about the coming Messiah whom we know was Jesus. Look at the very beginning of this Scripture and we see that right off the bat this Jesus has the Spirit of the Lord upon him. We know that. The Holy Spirit rests upon him at his baptism while his father singles him out as the one with whom he is pleased. Do you remember in Luke 4 when Jesus goes back home to his synagogue in Nazareth and he reads from Isaiah where he states: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.

Then in vs.3, in the second part of verse 3 we read about this person being a judge, someone who decides between right and wrong, someone who decides whether people have done right or wrong. The basis for his judgment, this Scripture states, is righteousness. We have seen this all along in Matthew, remember, that the separation of the sheep and the goats is based upon righteousness, those who reach out their hand to the hungry, thirsty, immigrants, those without clothes, the sick and those in prison. There is a consistency in these Scriptures and in these Jesus' who are described.

But this judgment is described pretty starkly, as strikes the earth with the rod of his mouth, the breath of his lips will kill the wicked. Not so much of a warm and fuzzy picture that we normally have at Advent. We read that when Jesus comes it will be a day of judgment since his first coming was one of humility. But we don't normally expect judgment to be Jesus' role. And we don't normally talk about hell during Advent. But I believe that hell is real, not just a creation of our imagination where our worst enemies will go.

When we look at our Matthew Scripture we see in vs.10 John the Baptist's message that an ax is ready to cut down any tree which does not bear fruit. What does bearing fruit look like? Come one folks, Matthew 25, reaching out to the hungry, thirsty, immigrants, those without clothes, the sick, and those in prison. That's the fruit that is expected of us. Again in vs.12 we read about a winnowing fork that will clear a threshing floor and chaff which will be burned with unquenchable fire. I had to look up winnowing fork. Who knows what it is? Some of you should know.

He also makes sure that those who might be there thinking that their ancestry, their time in church, their history and their pedigree might somehow spare them from this separation, from this judgment that Jesus would be meeting out, he said, uhm no. No relationship then no salvation. Pedigree does not guarantee anything. When you recognize your sin, confess your sin, ask for forgiveness from the one who came in the flesh, died in the flesh and rose again in the flesh, and reaches out to you says be my child. Obey me, follow me, don't put your trust in anything and anyone else.

What did you expect from Jesus? Whom did you expect Jesus to be, and who are you expecting Jesus to be this Advent season? We had a bit of an accident this year as we were decorating, one of the Jesus' from our nativity scene fell and broke, but don't worry, we can put him back together again. But there is a part of me that wants to put him in the manger broken,

the kind of Jesus that we would not expect, but it is the Jesus that we get. At the ministerium breakfast this Wednesday John Meck got us thinking about the difference between expectations and expectancy. You can have your expectations not met, but still maintain your spirit of expectancy knowing that there is hope and promise as God assures us. The Jesus that was on this earth and will come again is not the one that we would expect, but it should not cut down our sense of expectancy.

We wait during this season and I hope that we wait not with a sense of entitlement but rather a sense of being a servant. The Jesus that is a part of our season of expectancy is one who allows us to trust without seeing. He allows us to hope in that which is promised. He demands that we act with confidence based upon that hope and promise. Advent is the time to get it right. It is the time to repent, to do the right thing as John tells us in vs.8 to bear fruit worthy of repentance.