

Matthew 3:1-12, Is. 11:1-10
Waiting for Peace
Sunday December 4th, 2016

A story is told about three women were standing around bragging about their children. The first said, “My son grew up to be a Doctor!”



The second said, “My son grew up to be an Engineer!”



The third woman was quiet for a while and then piped up and said, “My son grew up to be a sign post!”



Now being a sign post is not on the top of the list of any person, even so it's a job and its honest work. But here in our scripture we read of a person who actually grew up to be a sign post and everyone was proud, (except of course those who had him killed)!

John the Baptist was a sign post for Jesus. His job was to point to the coming Messiah, the Christ. As he himself said, “I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

In the gospel of Matthew John the Baptist appears suddenly on the scene. In Matt. right before John the Baptist appears, the last story we read is of Jesus as a small boy, probably 12, and then suddenly John the Baptist “appeared in the wilderness of Judea proclaiming ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’”

Here the stage is set for Jesus' ministry and John the B was the sign post pointing to him. The prophecies of this time were written down 550 to 430 years before they occurred. Isaiah spoke of the appearance of John the Baptist 550 years before when he wrote, "A voice cries out: **In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.**"

The prophet Malachi had written 430 years before John the Baptist's appearance, "**See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me.**" The stage had been planned and set. And when John the Baptist appeared he was dressed and ate the clothing and food of a prophet, and more in particular the prophet Elijah. John the Baptist came in the spirit and demeanor of Elijah again in fulfillment of prophecy and all the prophecies pointed to Jesus.



John the Baptist was rough in demeanor, speech and message, but the message began in grace and was the same message that Jesus brought, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.**" John the Baptist then went on in no uncertain terms to call sin, sin and call powerful and weak alike to repentance, to a turning away from sin towards the love and lifestyle of God.

J the B confronted Kings and in particular Herod. He confronted the religious authorities the Pharisees and Sadducees. He confronted the common people of the land with their sin and called them to turn to God. He called people to rid their lives of things that steal and destroy peace. He called one and all to bear the fruit of repentance: a changed heart and life turned towards God.

Now some in the church today are called to speak to Kings and president, cultures and societies. Jim Nibbelink is leaving for Bethlehem Israel on Tuesday for a meeting of Palestinian Christians, who are gathering on behalf of achieving human rights for all residents of Palestine and Israel. And some are called to simply speak to family/friends. The message for all who speak and those who listen is

to turn to God and bear the fruit of repentance. We are all called to be signposts.

Now it is hard to relate to J the B and God's message through him, because he wore strange clothing even for his day (camel's hair robe and leather belt) and ate things (locust) that even in his day weren't on many people's menus. He also spoke to royalty, government and religious leaders, people in power and confronted them. He spoke to powerful people who most of us would never dream of meeting much less confronting. So the call to repent and bear the fruit of repentance seems to be for someone else and someplace else than you and I, here and now.

But remember last week how I spoke of the two meanings for "waiting"? Waiting can mean we are "waiting" for Christmas or "waiting" for a bus. Or it can mean "waiting on someone" like a waitress waiting on a table, waiting in terms of serving. It is in that second sense that today I want us to consider our and J the B's mission of "Waiting for Peace."

The question is what are you and I doing to serve the cause of peace? Or to put it another way, **what are you and I doing to serve people to bring the peace of the Kingdom of God here on earth?**

Now again we might think this doesn't apply to me, because I have no power to bring peace to the Middle East, but how about your family, your home, your neighborhood? What are you doing to bring peace to this very chaotic world? Where are you an instrument of healing?



The Isaiah reading shows what the ideal will one day be, like the cover of our bulletin with the wolf lying down with the lamb. We know in this world that such a thing would not be so peaceful for the wolf would be called "Hungry" and the lamb "Lunch".

But in the Tuesday reading of the Upper Room devotional it told the story of a woman in Africa who took just a few minutes out of her day to help three small scared girls cross a very busy road. Not a great earth shattering act of service in some great cause of peace, but for those three small girls, in that moment it meant all the world to them.

As Mother Teresa said, “**We can’t do great things. We can only do little things with great love.**” In our bulletin insert is the address to send a Christmas card and maybe even a gift to the child you sponsor in Agua Prieta. Half our members support children there. I am haunted by how much the Peso has fallen against the dollar. Border families and towns are really hurting. \$10 is not much to us, but to those in Mexico it’s an entire day’s pay. I sent my student in Mexico a Christmas gift for her and her family.

Sin steals peace from persons, families, societies and the world. We need to call sin, sin in order to address it. Jesus always demanded the name of a demon before he cast it out. We need to get in touch with Jesus so that we can see what is bringing chaos to our world and others, and name it, so that they can find peace.

It took centuries for people to fully understand the evil effects of tobacco on the body before it was fully called out as destructive. In this world sin causes “hurt and destruction”. That is what will not be present in the New Heaven and Earth that both the Isaiah passage and the Matthew speak to at the end. Isaiah 11:9, “**They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.**”

This won’t happen in this world, but we can work toward it we can serve toward it.

You see from reading the Isaiah passage that the sin and chaos that is in this world even affects the created order, the plants and in particular here the animals. Sin creates chaos and destroys peace and we as United Methodist Christians are called to address what we can as we can.

Our Mission statement reflects this, **“To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”** “The world” includes the created order, the plants and animals the land air and sea. It’s not a radical environmentalism; but one that takes seriously our first job, our first work here on earth to be stewards of our planet.

Ultimately, total peace will only be found in the New Heaven and Earth, but whenever we seek to be found serving peace, waiting for peace in the many forms it can take; we are bringing the future Kingdom of God to the here and now of earth.

I was visiting a couple of members of our congregation this week and in their window I saw several environmental stickers and stickers from groups that seek to take care of animals such as ASPCA, and PETA. They have been doing their part as best they can to serve the cause of Peace on Earth.

So serve the cause of Peace, wait on Peace wherever you can this season. In your circle of family and friends is there someone you need to call and make peace with? Do you personally need to make peace with God? Colossians 1:19-20 says, **“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, *by making peace* through the blood of his cross.”**

You have been given the power through the blood of the cross to bring peace, to be peace in these situations and more. Do you have someone in your life you need to invite to turn to God or turn back to God in this season? If you can’t find the words I have found some for Christmas day when I speak in worship on “Welcome Home.” Just invite that friend to be here with you.

Now I would submit to you that the words of prophecy that were spoken of for John the Baptist are also for you and for me. It was prophesied that he would **“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”**

As I contemplated this scripture I realized that this prophecy applies to everyone in this room, who has repented and believes in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

This is prophecy is for you!

As part of the Church of Jesus Christ you are as called as John to prepare the way of the Lord for other people. You are as called and as capable as John was to call people to repent--to turn to God in this season and bear the fruit of repentance.

You might think that only pastors or evangelists are called to do this. I would submit to you that all baptized Christian are called to fulfill this prophecy.

Life is God given and made for a purpose and in this season of the year our purpose is to prepare ourselves through repentance for the Advent of Jesus Christ. Our purpose is to turn our hearts and minds and lives to God and to be signposts to invite others to turn with us.

All the celebrations of the birth of Jesus help us to turn, to repent and invite others for the focus of most of the celebration in America is on the birth of the Christ Child. We can use this to call and invite.

This is a perfect week and season to do this. On Wednesday begins our Walk to Bethlehem a telling of the Good News the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have a Chancel Choir Christmas program coming up. We have bells. We have Christmas Eve services. We have many opportunities to help ourselves and others turn to God.

Last week I tried to have a video played called Christmas Invite. I had a bad copy of it; so I bought a new one that works. It fits this week just as much as last. It is a call to invite, who you know, to serve on to wait on others in the cause of hope and peace.

ROLL: CHRISTMAS INVITE

Again, strive to make peace with self, God, Family and Friends and all of creation as we turn to God in worship in this season.

Amen