

Advent 3

Morning Prayer A

First Lesson: Jeremiah 1:4-10, 17-19

Second Lesson: Luke 1:57-80

Homily

This morning the lessons and collect concern St. John the Baptist -- or perhaps better, the Baptizer -- as he was not a member of that particular denomination of Christians.

John came as a bridge between the Old Testament or Covenant and the New. His voice is both the last voice of Old Testament prophecy and the opening voice of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Just before today's New Testament reading, as we recall, John's birth (to a woman past the age of childbearing) had been announced to his father by an angel. Zacharias had been struck dumb as a token that, regardless of his doubt, the message was true,

and he was unable to speak for nine full months, rather a difficult situation for a priest.

The boy was born.

His name was given,

Suddenly his father could speak,

and his pent up desire

to praise his God with his voice

brought us the canticle we ordinarily use in

Morning Prayer,

called "Benedictus" from its first word in Latin,

"Blessed."

Zacharias then turned to his newborn boy,

and spoke directly and prophetically to him:

"Child, you're going to go before the Lord.

You'll prepare the road for Him,

You'll bring His people the message of salvation,

and give them light."

And the boy grew up,

sought God in the desert,

and emerged

with a message and a baptism of repentance,

a fierce call to confess

and forsake the sin that infects us all,

and to seek the promised forgiveness --

a message both harsh

in its proclamation of judgment,

and hopeful in its promise
of redemption in the coming King.

Did Zacharias realize how closely he echoed the
Prophet Jeremiah?

It seems very likely, as
the Old Testament Scriptures were then being read
through the lens of strong Messianic expectation.

The Old Testament reading, from Jeremiah,
relates a conversation the Prophet had with God,
at the time of his call.

"I'm too young," he said, "really only a child,
how can I be a prophet?"

"You are," said God,
"Before you were born I knew you,
and called you, and chose you."

*"Say not, I am a child:
for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee,
and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.
Be not afraid of their faces:
for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.*

Jeremiah did as He was asked.
He spoke boldly what the Lord gave him to speak.
He trusted God to deliver him.

and he was martyred for his efforts.

Though this was Jeremiah's story,
lived out in Jeremiah's life,
we find it also to be prophetic,
fulfilled in detail in John the Baptist,
whom God knew before he was conceived,
on whom He poured out the Spirit
while he was still in the womb,
whom He called to preach fearlessly,
trusting in God,
and who, also, was martyred for his efforts.

Jeremiah's ministry and preaching
was fulfilled in John.
John's ministry and preaching was fulfilled
in the One whose way he prepared,
Our Lord Jesus Christ,
begotten of the Father before all worlds,
conceived of the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary,
who also suffered and died
-- for our sins and for the sins of the world.
who fulfilled it all when he rose from the dead,
according to the Scriptures.

And where do we come in?
He knew us and called us,

as St. Paul said,
before the foundation of the world.
He's commissioned us to go into the world,
to speak truth,
to trust in his protection,
and perhaps to pay a price.
We too are called to present ourselves, our souls and
bodies,
to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice unto
Him.
No matter what it may cost,
it is by that same message we are called to share,
by that Passion, cross, and resurrection,
that we are saved, that we hope,
that we will come, at last, to everlasting joy.

Let us pray again the words of today's Collect:

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at thy first coming didst
send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee;
Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy
mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready
thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to
the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to
judge the world, we may be found an acceptable
people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the
Father and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world
without end.

see also the sermon by Canon Hollister
under this date
in the Sermons by Other Authors

Advent 3

Morning Prayer B

First Lesson: Isaiah 35

Second Lesson: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-23

Homily

"Prepare ye the way of the Lord!"
was the cry of St. John the Baptist,
"Make straight in the desert
a highway for our God!"

Listen to what Isaiah said in our First lesson:

*... [a] highway shall be there, and a way,
and it shall be called The way of holiness;
the unclean shall not pass over it;*

There is something different about the road a
Christian walks.

It is not the path of those who live to please
themselves.

It is not a road we have marked to serve our own
purposes.

It is not the same road that everyone walks.

It is a highway of holiness.

Holiness has at least three meanings, related, but not
quite the same:

To be holy is to be pure.

To be holy is to be separated from a world of sin.

To be holy is to be set aside for God.

There is a highway we are called to walk.

There is a highway that will bring us to heaven,
but, as Isaiah went on,

it shall be for those entitled to walk it:

*"the wayfaring men, though fools,
shall not err therein.
No lion shall be there,
nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon,
it shall not be found there;
but the redeemed shall walk there: "*

There are temptations and pitfalls
to the right and to the left.

To stray from the path is to be in danger
from the roaring lion seeking someone to devour,
but on that highway the forces of evil cannot walk,

He who walks in holiness will not fall.

"The redeemed shall walk there."

Though we walk through the desert,
he tells us of abundant blooming.

Though we have been blind,
we shall see the beauty of His works..
Though we have been deaf,
we shall hear His word.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of death,"
says the Psalmist,
"I will fear no evil, for thou art with me,
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

We hear a promise of strength
in weak hands and weak knees,
a message of hope to those who have not hoped
"The redeemed shall walk there."

"The redeemed shall walk there."

Redeemed, as St. John wrote in the Apocalypse,
"by the blood of the Lamb
and the word of our testimony,"
bought and paid for by the Sacrifice
that stands at the center of time,
filled with life by His resurrection,
and choosing, under His guidance,
to walk the path He has shown us.

Every chance we get we come to the altar.
Every chance we get

we join with that holy Offering.
Every chance we get
we feast on His Body and His Blood.
Every time we do these things
"in remembrance of Him",
we are placed in the very center of
the Highway of holiness -
but do we walk there?
Do we stay on the safe road?
Our lesson from St. Paul bears repeating.
It is a marvelous and short outline
of what it is to walk that highway,
a picture of just what holiness looks like.
Listen ...

... we beseech you, brethren,
to know them which labour among you,
and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;
And to esteem them very highly in love
for their work's sake.

We do not walk alone.
God has given us bishops and priests
and other leaders,
both in our own day, and in days gone by.
Do we look to them
as those He has placed over us,
or as those hired to serve us?

And be at peace among yourselves.

We are in the midst of so many controversies today.
Is it the wrangling that is most easily seen?
Or is it the peace that passes understanding?

*Now we exhort you, brethren,
warn them that are unruly,
comfort the feebleminded, support the weak,
be patient toward all men.
See that none render evil for evil unto any man;
but ever follow that which is good,
both among yourselves, and to all men.
Rejoice evermore.
Pray without ceasing.
In every thing give thanks: for this is the will
of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.
Quench not the Spirit.
20 Despise not prophesyings.
21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.
22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.*

And that is what holiness looks like.
Do we look like that?

*23 And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly;
and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body*

*be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord
Jesus Christ.*

May it be so.

Let us pray again the words of today's Collect:

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at thy first coming didst
send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee;
Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy
mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready
thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to
the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to
judge the world, we may be found an acceptable
people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the
Father and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world
without end.

Advent 3

Evening Prayer A

First Lesson: Nahum 1:3-8, 15

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 9:7-23

Homily

WAR

One day in the 1940s ,
nearly every newspaper in America
had the same headline.

The same three letters
in the largest type they could find
filled the front pages -- everywhere.

WAR

The clash of nations was out in the open.
"Sides" were clearly chosen.
Great strivings and great sufferings were begun.
and great outcomes were sought.

WAR

The time of neutrality was past.
The resources of a nation were channeled.
There was only one purpose evident.

WAR

St. Paul began our New Testament lesson this way:
"Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges?"

He was echoing some words of his Lord and ours:
*" ...what king, going to make war
against another king,
sitteth not down first, and consulteth
whether he be able with ten thousand
to meet him that cometh against him
with twenty thousand?
...likewise, whosoever he be of you
that forsaketh not all that he hath,
he cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:29 & 31)*

War is serious business.

It requires everything a nation has.
and often requires vastly more than it has.

Have you stopped to think that the people of God
are repeatedly called a holy nation?
Have you realized that this nation is at war,
and has been from the beginning,
and will be to the end of the age?

*(Revelation 12:7) "And there was war in heaven:
Michael and his angels fought against the dragon:
and the dragon fought and his angels."*

The Prophet Nahum, in the First Lesson,
spoke of the anger and power of the Lord,
of judgment,

of drought and earthquake and conflagration,
of the utter defeat of the enemies of God.
In the midst of the rage and the warning,
he suddenly says to God's people:
"God is good."

He describes a coming Deliverer in these terms:
*"Behold upon the mountains
the feet of him that bringeth good tidings,
that publisheth peace!"*

and declares a promise:
*"O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts,
perform thy vows:
for the wicked shall no more pass through thee;
he is utterly cut off."*

Make no mistake about it.
We are at war.
From the very beginning of this world,
Satan and all his forces
have been challenging the righteousness of God,
and have successfully led men to abandon truth,
to desert holiness,
to pursue self-will and every evil result of it.

God gave His Son,
General, Teacher, and Sacrifice.

He came into this world,
became one of us as we shall be celebrating in two
weeks,
taught us the way of holiness,
and paid a price.

What is the cost of war?
Everything. --- Everything.
He that goes to war,
goes in the full knowledge
that he thus offers his very life to that cause.
His life is not his own, not any more.
At Gethsemane our Lord counted the cost.
He knew to its fullest what that cost would be.
He even asked that he might be released from that
cup.
but, finally, he said,
"Not my will, Father, but Yours!"
And He gave Himself a Sacrifice for our sins.

He's called us to follow Him,
to take up our cross,
to present ourselves a living sacrifice.
Holy Church, from the earliest days,
recognized two categories of saints:
the martyrs,
whose life was taken from them in the battle,
and the confessors, who likewise laid theirs down,

but somehow survived.

This is the only vocation a Christian has:
to give himself, to give herself, to die to self,
to lay it all down for Him.

This world is not a friendly place
for the Christian faith.

Secular society continually looks for ways
to get God out of the way.

Churches conform to the world
and fall away from truth.

As Traditional Anglicans some of us have indeed left
much.

If we are faithful, we will leave more.

St. Paul gives us an example
of that kind of commitment.

He looked for no privilege.

He did not seek an easy way.

He gave everything,

and called upon God's people to do the same,
and to march together on the battlefield.

Let us pray again the words of today's Collect:

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at thy first coming didst
send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee;
Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy
mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready

thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to
the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to
judge the world, we may be found an acceptable
people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the
Father and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world
without end.

Advent 3

Evening Prayer B

First Lesson: Isaiah 26:1-11

Second Lesson: Matthew 9:35-10:15

Homily

*"The harvest is plenteous,
but the laborers are few."*

Our Lord Himself,
though he was God Almighty
walking on the earth,
was, by divine choice, one single man,
limited, as are we, to one single place,
limited to the strengths and weaknesses
of a human being.
Unless he were to exercise
the omnipotence of God,
and force the free will of man,
he had voice and example and human touch
as the only available instruments
for the work at hand,
and that work was to carry the Gospel of God
to every man woman and child on the planet.
As man he couldn't be everywhere at one,
and, as man he could not be present in all of time.

How was he to spread the Good News?
Simple, really -- by recruiting men.
That is what he did.

Today we hear that he chose twelve.
We have their names:
Simon Peter, Andrew; James the son of Zebedee,
John, Philip, Bartholomew; Thomas,
Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus;
Simon the Canaanite,
and Judas Iscariot.

*"he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast
them out,
and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of
disease."*

and he sent them forth to preach
in the places he could not physically reach.
Later he called seventy more
and sent them out in a similar way.
And then the time came:
He was killed
as a sacrifice for the sins of the world,
the whole point of all this preaching,
and conquered death,
and was taken up into heaven.
The message remained,

fuller and more blessed than it ever had been.
The world still needed to hear the message,
but the Christ no longer walked here
in the way he had.

He left a Church.
On the Eleven remaining
after the defection of Judas,
on the seventy still laboring,
and on the rest of the infant Church,
He poured out His Holy Spirit,
and filled the Church with the power of God.
He entrusted the work and the message
to those Apostles.
He commissioned them,
and all those over whom they had the leadership,
to bring the message of repentance,
of hope, and of salvation
to every people and every language
in the whole world.

We believe in an Apostolic ministry, and rightly so.
We affirm that those Apostles appointed bishops,
and that our bishops today bear their message
and their authority.
We believe in an ordained order of priests,
who are entrusted with the Word and the
Sacraments.

Thank God that He has left us these!
Without them we could not endure,
and the work could not be accomplished.

*"The harvest is plenteous,
but the laborers are few."*

Are there enough ordained workers?
How many are there struggling along
without priests?
How many are there who have not even heard?
How many are there even in our own communities
that are without the saving Gospel
and Sacraments?
How many does Our Lord wish to reach
and to save?
Pray that the Lord of the harvest send laborers
into the harvest.
Pray for vocations.
Encourage those who are called.
Let word of the need be constantly before us.

*"The harvest is plenteous,
but the laborers are few."*

Can there ever be enough ordained workers
to reach everyone?
Can we expect a priest or a deacon

or even a licensed reader,
to bring our next-door neighbor to salvation?
or to point our co-workers to the Lord?
Do they need to hear?

The bishops are not the Church.
The priests are not the Church.
They certainly lead us,
but we are the Church.
the laborers for whom we pray
are not all ordained men,
though some of them are and the need is great.
The laborers for whom we pray
are already with us.
They are us.
The work will not get done if we don't do it.

In our First Lesson, Isaiah sang:

*We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for
walls and bulwarks.*

We are that strong city.
The salvation of the Cross has been entrusted to us.
When we are confronted by evil, hear what he said:

*The foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the
poor, and the steps of the needy.*

Not the mighty, not the educated, not the official, but
the poor and the needy.

Us.

Are we fearful when we face this responsibility?

Sure we are, but listen on:

*Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD
JEHOVAH is everlasting strength:*

Let us pray again the words of today's Collect:

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send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee;
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thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to
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