

Advent 3, December 14, 2008

Is 61 and Jn 1 John the Baptist: Whatcha Say?!

FCMF #1

What's that you Say?!

Who are you? What's that you say?

Your not Elijah? Nor the Messiah?

And your not a prophet? Well then who are you?

WHO THE "BLEEP" ARE YOU!

and what the "bleep" do you think your doing?

Baptizing?! Why... you can't do that?! Who said you could do that?!

Your only a messenger, only a voice,

a lonely man in ragged clothes crying in the wilderness!

You can't do that?! I mean your not qualified!

Its certainly not expected... its not the norm!

Its not something we are used to or prepared for.

I mean, oh my, this is all so very unsettling.

Who am I? Who are you?!

What's that you say? Who are you looking for?

Who, or what, did you expect? What did you come out to see?

And if you aren't finding what your expecting,

then why did come out to the wilderness searching?

Why didn't you stay in town in the safety of the temple?
There's no time left for business as usual,
the world is going to hell in a hand basket!
For the times they are a changin!
But if it is the Messiah your looking for,
if it is God's Anointed One you seek,
then keep your eyes open, get ready!
Yes the one who can save us is coming!
But be careful what you are looking for
it may not be exactly what your expecting!
Just like Isaiah said,
the Anointed One will split open the skies, bursting into
our existence and bursting through our out-dated assumptions.
He may come like an earthquake, or hurtling stars from the sky,
and with fire and smoke!
But he may come softly and silently, like a gentle potter or a budding tree
or even a defenseless child.
And the anointed of God will be anointed with the very spirit of God
and bearing great news that will create great joy!
That those who are blind will see again, those who are deaf will hear again
and those held in captivity will be set free.
Good news that knows no limits, the kind of change that can transcend
all conceivable limits we imposed upon ourselves.

So who am I? And why do I do what I do?

I'm not who or what you think I am and
nor will I become who you want me to be.

First off, I know who I am not!

But let me ask you, who are you? And what are you are doing?

Are you ready for the new thing God is doing?

If not then start preparing, get ready- straighten out your act!

Repent, and turn 180 degrees around and go in a new direction!

Get baptized, get in the water and give some indication
of a sincere change of heart.

Know forgiveness and trust that God is love not punishment.

Then forgive others and as well, forgive yourself!

And who are you, who the (Bleep) do you think you are, Steve?

And what's that you've been sayin'?

Well last week I made some pretty harsh accusations,
accusing our society of sinking to new moral and spiritual depths!

You know, just when I thought our materialistic culture
could not sink any lower, it proved me wrong!

I shared from the pulpit the tragic the death, on Black Friday,
of a Wal-mart employee, who was trampled to death
by "frenzied" shoppers rushing the store to get a "bargain."

Now do I ever dare to wonder if it can get any worse?

But thats a good question- who am I? And who are you? Who are we?

What is it that defines us? What is it that makes us who we are?

Is it our material goods? Is it our ability to buy and own?

Or does our identity come from another source?

And where does the courage come from to construct an identity

that is contrary to the most insidious parts of our culture?

And where do we find the daily sustenance to resist and

finally break away from those things that enslave us!

I'm sorry... what's that you say John?

You found an identity? Where?

Humility?! Huh? I guess I don't get it?

Oh servant hood- you mean serving others?

But how does that instill and sustain our courage?

I mean after all aren't the humble merely walked on by the powerful?

I'm sorry I missed that? What's that you say?

Isaiah?! What's he got to do with it?

So, according to him the good news is that we are only grass!

Ya ya, I get it- were only mere mortals?

And that's suppose to be good news?

Yes I know that last week I talked about some of the benefits of mortality.

And yes none of them had anything to do

with getting to heaven sooner!

No, I'm not going to bore the good folks here by repeating it all!

I'll summarize it by simply saying that;

when we come to terms with our own mortality, then perhaps

we can be freed to concentrate on what is really important.

And by not having to spend so much time and energy worrying about

being in control then maybe our identity can be based upon

the things that are truly important or the stuff that is actually

good for us morally and spiritually!

What's that you say? Uh huh.. well sure, your right. I actually agree.

Yes, of course, just take a look around

at most of the monuments we build.

They're built to remember great leaders, presidents and war heros,

and of course, men mostly.

All of them did great things- some good and some not so good

and many no doubt were well meaning.

But I bet many were also driven by a desire to "leave their mark,"

to be remember, to live forever!

But what was the cost? The true cost of their eternity?

And of course I don't mean merely what was paid

to pour the foundations or carve the stone.

What were the cost in lives or cities destroyed?

Of people enslaved or oppressed by those who had the desire
and the power to have their image cast in bronze?

So just what are you saying? Huh John?

Could you make it just a bit more clear?

Humility, love, service, and mortality.

Yes you have our attention- especially with the last one!

Reminding us that we have only a short time here on this earth
does have a way of catching our attention.

And knowing that the time is short can get us more focused,
perhaps even more focused on that which is most important.

I'm sorry you said something else? Come again?

You say that we can, like Jesus, be anointed- be baptized
And not merely with water but also by the Spirit,
the very Spirit of God?!

And that this Spirit, this baptism, can cast out the fears that get in the way
of the courage that comes when we know the love of God.

Even the fear of death?!

And do you mean that with less fear we can learn to trust more?

Trust more in others and maybe even in ourselves?

And as this trust grows so does our ability to live with and participate in
communities of "right relationships?!"

Communities made up of other, sometimes fearful and at other times
courageous, spirit filled folk who also seek humbly to serve others

and who need the sustaining power of unconditional love?

A community of folks who yearn to do what is right and good

and who want to grow as individuals and as a community?

Excuse me a moment as I step out of character a bit to make my final point.

And that is, in the end, in reality, we may not be able to

significantly change our world let alone or present culture.

In reality we may not be able to “change” those sittin next to us or even

our family members who drive us nuts and need some serious change.

As mere mortals we may even have little success in changing ourselves.

But maybe, just maybe we might be able to swing this last option.

And in actuality, perhaps some concerted time and energy,

focused in that direction- in an effort to change me and only me-

perhaps that might be just enough and the best of all my efforts.

Now many of you know that I am quite passionate about correcting

and challenging the injustices that I perceive exist in this world!

I also believe that our faith should inspire us all to point out

these injustices to those in power and to demand that they

take action to create a world of peace and well being for all!

I know that I am not the only one here this morning who feels this way.

And yet I am coming to the realization, more and more,

that I am quite limited in actually making all this happen.

Increasingly I am confronted by the harsh reality that

I have very little control- that I am after all a mere mortal.
Increasingly, I am realizing just how important it is to be connected
with a source of both courage and sustenance.
And most importantly to be connected to source that is outside of myself.
A source, something or someone who does have some real control.
And I need to be connected to other folks who are seeking the same!

Excuse me? I'm sorry what's that you say? I know, I know

I was kinda busy talking with these folks. What's did you say, John?
Oh, be baptized?! Baptized with water and with Spirit!

Sounds a little out of the ordinary, even a little unsettling.
Yes, uh huh... thats right. The source of courage, connection with
the sustainer of life the one who knows my true identity!

We, you and me, we are not Messiahs, someone who can save the world!

We are not Elijah, or prophets who can call a culture
to its knees in repentance!

Most of the time we probably feel more like John the Baptist-
crying out, alone, heard by only by a few trees,
maybe some bushes and a bunch of rocks.

But never the less we cry out anyway!

And don't you ever forget just who you are! And just whose you are!

You are a child of God, a friend of Jesus. You are the anointed,
those baptized by the power of God's Spirit.

So you better get ready!

Get ready cause God come whether your ready or not.

What's that you say? Your not sure?

Well get ready anyway. Get ready, get prepared

for God comes to love and to forgive!

Prepare yourself and be ready, be ready so you can accept this gift-

a gift that truly keeps on giving.

A gift that can change us, turn us around and gives us the courage to love.

To love others and to even love ourselves.

I'm sorry, what's that you sat? A little louder please... I can't hear you.

Repeat after me, Get ready.

Now you answer me, Get ready for what?...

Come on now you can say it... say it loud and say it proud!

So are you, are you ready? Prepared?

Well then do it, prepare yourself, cause its worth it!

Get ready, cause its happening!

Don't hold back. Get ready!

That's what I'm talking about! Thats what I said.

Get ready!