

Second Sunday of Advent (C)

December 9, 2018

Baruch 5:1-9
Psalm 126:1-6
Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11
Luke 3:1-6

The Advent Season is one of the most beautiful seasons that we have in the church.

Yes, it is a season in the church
but pretty much not recognized
by the greater world community that surrounds us.

Even within the church,
many folks just simply ignore this season,
choosing to focus on the spirit of the holidays.

Advent is a time of anticipation as well as preparation
that Christ may be born in the world and in each of our lives.

Like many ancient historians,
the gospel writer Luke wants to date
the appearance of John the Baptist

and to help us see that he had
a significant role at the beginning
of Jesus's ministry.

It is the 15th year of Tiberius,
the successor of Augustus, who was strongly anti-Jewish.

Luke mentions Pontus Pilate, who was governor of Judea,
and three client kings who served at Rome's pleasure.

Finally, he refers to the temple leadership,
Annas and his son-in-law, Caiaphas.

Luke's readers of the day
would have known of the brutality of the Roman rulers
and that Jesus was crucified under these same powers.

The rhythm and cadence here
prepares the reader for some earth-shaking imperial event.

Yet, we are caught short by a simple statement,
“the word of God came to John, son of Zachariah in the desert.”

In this setting of power both in government and religion,
Luke is introducing one who is small and pretty insignificant.

These individuals on the seats of power
certainly pay John little or no attention.

Into the world of that day
controlled by ruthless despots
and shrewd self-righteous leaders,
the word of God comes to a prophet.

After 400 hundred years of prophetic silence,
Luke is declaring that the Lord has not abandoned his world—

the Lord continues to speak and act
though not necessarily in expected ways.

There is indeed a contrast
between the perceived power brokers in high places
and the Lord’s servant who wanders humbly in the wilderness.

John, it seemed, was unconcerned
about those in power as he “went into all the region around the Jordan.”

There is a very real reversal taking place.

The imperial and religious authorities believed
that they had control of the people,
yet the people were going out to John in droves.

John touched the genuine need
and thirst of the people.

As John preached and issued a call for repentance and baptism,
the ruling class, those in power, would not have been expected to notice.

A scripture scholar has referred to John the Baptist
as more a mystic than a moralist.

Both could certainly refer to someone who is religious,
calling the people to what is right and good.

Yet,
the mystic calls for a deeper reflection on transformation
that genuinely moves a person to make room
for the very presence of God.

Ritual washings were commonplace
and people believed this practice cleansed the body
and sanctified it for worship.

While John's baptism was directed
to move beyond the mind and penetrate more deeply
into the heart and soul.

Where the gospel passage began with a list of rulers
who did not bring about salvation,

Luke ends the lesson with the expectation of a Savior
who can bring the fulness of life and salvation.

In a few weeks we will hear Mary's Magnificat
where she prophetically proclaims
that rulers will be thrown from their thrones
and the lowly will be lifted up.

We find this transformation beginning to unfold here today.

Our faith in Christ gives us a very different way
of seeing and looking at those who hold power and influence.

The ultimate authority is in the one
who speaks, who lives, who embodies the truth.

Christ is hope for this troubled world,
Christ is ready to be born again in each of our lives.

John the Baptist's very life as a mystic
affirms that God was doing something new,
and the individuals
who wished to be a part the new thing God was doing,
had to renew themselves.

All of this is to ponder the mystery and be open and ready.

God still remains faithful to us,
still interested, still ready to save.

These few short weeks of Advent afford us
the opportunity to be open, and ready.

The sacred word and the gift of Eucharist
give us a spirit of hope on this Sunday of Advent.

With the Lord,
we go into this new week
with confidence and hope.