

Sermon, December 17, 2017 - Advent 3,

Greater Things to Come!!

John 1:6–8, 19–28



Dear Friends in Christ

Traditionally, Advent is a period of prayer, repentance, and preparation to celebrate Christ's first coming. The Third Sunday in Advent is commonly referred to as "Rejoice Sunday" (Latin, *Gaudete*), a reference to the Epistle of 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24 that tells us: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing" and the Old Testament Reading of Is 61:1–4, 8–11: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed

me with the garments of salvation". And that's the theme we will mediate on today, as we mediate on the Gospel reading for today. That's what John came preaching and pointing to, the joy of God's salvation, God's grandeur work for his people.

Once again we recall John's role as God's messenger as the preparing the Way for the King to come. Many heard his preaching, followed him and were prepared by them through his baptizing. Although there were also those who didn't accept, believe, or even think this was a man from God. Those were the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, so they send priests and Levites to investigate and enquire to determine if John was the long-promised Messiah. So they question him, Who are you? Are you de Elijah that is to come? And with what authority you do what you do?

So John declared openly, publicly and straight forward that he wasn't the Christ, or a pretender, neither was a Elijah, neither the True Prophet, that is Christ. John was simply the "the voice of one crying in the wilderness." "The voice" announcing that greater things were coming, that Christ is at hand. That the True Light of God was coming, to shine over those who were in darkness! That true joy was at hand!

And as we learned las Sunday, John's message wasn't only for those of his time, but even for us today. Therefore John's answer to those investigating him, are also for us and they are good news, because we too need God's light and yes we need joy.

Now, you and I know that, but there isn't much we can do about, I mean to really see the light and have true joy. So people fall into a sense of resignation. As we look at the world around us and our own situation, many generally respond with the well-worn and fatalistic cliché "it is what it is."

And the future? Frankly, most of us don't want even to think about it. Who knows what's going to happen in the Middle East? Will North Korea do with its nuclear arsenal? With the economy being what it is, will I have a job next year? What kind of world will my children face as they grow up? How will my grandchildren be able to survive in the midst of frightening moral decay?

So how then is John's message good news for us today? Because his (John's) message is about greater things to come! His message, as one sent from God, was a message of hope and a promise of greater things to come in the coming Saviour, which would be cause for great rejoicing.

Just that rejoicing is not in the ordering of our politics or economics throughout the world, to provide health, wealth, and happiness. If that were the case, perhaps God would send a Saviour to run for public office. But even when politicians promise “a car in every driveway and a chicken in every pot,” is not going to resolve our most basic need: that is our reconciliation with God.

From the fall into sin by the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, our relationship with God has been broken. Now, as Jesus said, our fruits are sin and corruption, he said: “...what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.” (Matthew 15:18–19).

That’s the state of our world. Even when our world and our society want to be at their best, even in this current season when we hear so much talk about peace and goodwill, in reality the consequences of sin in the lives of people and nations are evident everywhere, as you know, and as you have felt the consequence of sin rampant in this world, there is nothing we can do, other than be angry and sad, or indifferent even.

But that’s the world, how about sin in your life? Now that’s different and even uncomfortable! Isn’t it? Its effects may be manifested in ill health, loneliness, broken relationships, suffering, or some kind of personal loss. We all experience these things. They may be the result of our own sin or the sin of others or simply the result of life in a sinful and dying world. As you see there isn’t much for which to rejoice. It was that way two thousand years ago, and it’s true also today. But, is that all there is?

No, there is more, and the best is to come! And that’s what John came to announce.

Like so many others, John was sent with divine authority on a divine mission to announce that some Great was coming. As you see God didn’t abandon us after all, despite our sin. God promised to Adam and Eve and to future generations to send a Saviour to atone for sin and to rescue us from the power of sin, death, and Satan. He promised and he fulfilled that promise! And now we see how it was fulfilled.

John the Baptist was part of the plan. He was sent to “bear witness about the light.” His message was clear: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 3:2). He baptized people in the Jordan River and it was a Baptism unto repentance. Judging by the crowds that came to be baptized by him, but pointing them to the One who will really judge all. People heard him. The Bible tells us that “Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins” (Mt 3:5–6). Because someone greater than Him was coming. He was the forerunner; yes God has a plan a plan that is light and joy.

In fact John’s entire ministry and message were pregnant with the promise of greater things to come. That was the reason he was chosen and sent by God. He was to point people to the One whom God had sent to be our Saviour. So one verse following our sermon text, he points to Jesus and identifies him as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (v 29).

When you look at John the Baptist, you can’t help but see greater things yet to come, because John points you to Jesus, and when you look at Jesus, you see the true light of the world! He is the one whom God promised to send in order to redeem fallen mankind. Clearly, in Jesus, God was at work, and he has done something about our sinful condition.

However, in the Gospels, we read of resistance and opposition to Jesus because he didn't meet the mistaken expectations of people. Those who were politically minded wanted a revolutionary leader to overthrow the Romans. Instead, the King tells them, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Many of those who had witnessed the miraculous feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand wanted him as their "bread king." Instead, he tells them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

Even in our day, people have mistaken expectations regarding Jesus, as we learned a few Sundays ago, they take Jesus to be a different king. Some see Jesus as simply an eloquent voice for a better society, like Ghandi or Martin Luther King Jr. Some see him as a twenty-first-century "bread king" who wants everyone to have worldly wealth and that this wealth is available for the asking. Some also see him as completely irrelevant and want nothing to do with him. None of these human expectations has ever come to grips with the most basic problem of all—that because of the sin we inherited and the sin we commit, we are broken and dying people in a broken and dying world.

But when, in faith, we look at the One to whom John says is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, we can look forward to greater things to come. That which has separated us from God, that which so often brings hurt and pain to human relationships, is forgiven because the Lamb of God, his own Son, took our sinful nature along with all our sins to the cross. There he put them to death by his own suffering and death. John's Baptism was one of repentance. But there were greater things to come.

How would you summarize your life today? Do you also think and are resigned to "it is what it is? Have you lost sight of the wonder of forgiveness, life, and salvation—the greater things we have in our crucified and risen Saviour? Have you forgotten those wonderful promises that, through Christ, God causes "all things [to] work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28)? Do you look to the future with fear in your heart because of the uncertainties of life and in the world?

Then today, rejoice, rejoice because there is a greater One! To those haunted and bothered by sin, guilt, and shame, listen to these words of joy: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). For those who face uncertain times, illness, or even imminent death hear God's promises "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). In Christ, we have a genuine reason to rejoice always.

John the Baptist, as the forerunner of Christ, proclaimed a message of repentance and urged the people to prepare for the imminent coming of the promised Saviour. No matter what people were going through or what they had to endure, there was a sense that greater things were to come because the promise of the Messiah was about to be fulfilled. So it is with us today as he comes to us in Word and Sacrament and as we eagerly await his second coming. "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit" (1 Cor 2:9–10).

Today, as we rejoice at what God has done and at the greater things to come, my prayer for you is taken from this morning's Epistle: "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24).

Amen.