

“Christmas Solitude”

Luke 3:1-6

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Frankfort, Kentucky

December 6, 2015

Communion Devotion

This morning our attention is drawn to the last Old Testament prophet, John the Baptist. You might think this a bit odd on the second Sunday in Advent. At this time of the year, our focus is normally upon Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus.

Their time will come, but this morning John the Baptist has a message we need to hear as we continue our preparation for Christmas. Let us not forget that John also had a role to play in the birth narrative. The story of his birth to the elderly couple, Elizabeth and Zechariah, was woven into Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth.

This is one reason Luke introduced John in our text as Zechariah’s son. He wanted to make this connection. John preceded Jesus at his birth and is doing this again as Jesus begins his public ministry.

In today’s passage, John was a grown man who received a call from God to be a prophet similar to Elijah. His task was to introduce Jesus and get his listeners ready to receive the message Jesus had for them.

As interested as I am in the words John spoke, I am more focused today upon where he was. He was on the move throughout the region of the Jordan River, primarily in the wide, barren, lonely spaces. Why was he there?

Wouldn’t you think he would be in Jerusalem, the hub of religious activity for the Jews? There John could mix and mingle with the religious and secular power brokers while being

surrounded by thousands of common folk who needed to hear his message. **Why was John wasting time traveling around sparse hillsides miles from Jerusalem?**

First of all, John was more comfortable there. He identified with Bedouins more than city dwellers.

He needed time to think and pray, and this was hard to do in Jerusalem with all its commercial, religious and political activity. Jerusalem was a busy, noisy place, which was not conducive to pondering.

If John was going to find his voice, he needed to hear God's voice first. For him, that meant pulling away to quiet places under the open sky where everything he saw and heard would remind him of the glory and majesty of God.

There was another reason John's ministry was conducted in the rough and open country side. His voice would be drowned out in Jerusalem; his message would be muted. In the city, his voice would be one of many, and he would have to compete for people's time and attention. In all likelihood, he would lose that battle.

This would not be the case in the country, though. His lone voice would be heard, and his message would be understood, as it surely was. Every day, John baptized people who confessed and repented of their sins as a way of clearing their hearts and minds to receive the good news Jesus would have for them.

How does this speak to us today, this second Sunday in Advent? If we are going to feed our spirits during this holy season, chances are it will not occur in public places designed to distract us from the real reason for this season. Only when we follow John's lead and pull away from the busyness of these days will we hear a word from the Lord and find our own voice.

Have you noticed in the first part of Luke's account of John the Baptist and Jesus' births, men are strangely quiet. Zechariah's voice was taken away from him soon after Elizabeth discovered she was going to have a baby and Joseph never speaks. Only the words of Elizabeth and Mary are heard, recorded and remembered for a lengthy period of time.

You know from your study of ancient cultures, this was highly unusual. For the most part, women were seen and not heard.

Why does Luke do this? Perhaps he was trying to tell us Advent is a time for listening to voices that get drowned out at other times by the clamor of our culture's more powerful noises.

Find your place of solitude in the weeks ahead and go there often. God will meet you and have a word for you each time you go that will feed your spirit, light your path and give you a message others need to hear.