

Are You Ready?
Rev. Craig M. Sturm Trinity Lutheran Church, Sherman Texas
December 6, 2009 Advent 2C
Based on Luke 3:1-6

“This is a test of the Emergency Broadcast System.” Do you remember those words being announced from your TV? I know you remember that annoying, high-pitched sound that accompanied those words. It got your attention, and, of course, that was the point. “This is a test of the Emergency Broadcast System. The broadcasters in your area in voluntary cooperation with the FCC and federal, state and local authorities have developed this system to keep you informed in the event of an emergency. If this had been an actual emergency, you would have been instructed to tune to one of the broadcast stations in your area.”

As we encounter John the Baptist out in the wilderness today, that annoying, high-pitched, in-your-face sound comes to mind. John the Baptist is out to get our attention. He is putting out an alert on all channels. Listen up, people! This is not a test! This is a spiritual emergency! The Messiah, the One God promised generations ago, is on his way!

John the Baptist is our alert system to inform us of what is happening. Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah is on his way, so you’d better be prepared. Everything is about to change.

C.S. Lewis wrote a marvelous tale about the Christian faith called *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. In the story, little Lucy stumbles through the back of a wardrobe into the imaginary country of Narnia. Although it is summer in England (where the wardrobe is), it is winter in Narnia. Shivering in the cold, little Lucy soon encounters a faun who informs her that it is always winter in Narnia, caused by a spell of the Great White Witch.

Little Lucy gets all excited because she associates Christmas with winter. “Oh, no,” the faun replies, “in Narnia, it’s always winter, but never Christmas.” What a marvelous way to describe what our lives would be like without Christ. “Always winter, but never Christmas.”

Without Christ, there is no forgiveness, no hope. Without Christ, there is no abundant life. Without Christ, life has no meaning.

By God choosing to take on flesh and living among us in the person of Jesus Christ, God breaks the spell of “always winter.” The powerful hold that sin, brokenness, rebellion and death have upon us will be defeated. “Christ is coming,” John the Baptist proclaims to us this day. “So repent! Get your heart right with God.”

Some might hear what John has to say as words of warning, words of judgment. But, O no, we know better. The announcement of Christ’s arrival is good news. It is a message of hope and salvation.

John wants us to stop for a moment and to think seriously about our relationship with God. Where do we stand? Are we making the right choices? Are we moving in the right direction?

With Jesus on the way, we are about to have a “come to Jesus” meeting, so we’d better make sure that our heart is in the right place. Jesus will see right through all of our excuses and lies, so we’d better come clean.

A state trooper once pulled over a woman for going 15 miles an hour over the speed limit. After the trooper handed her a ticket, she asked him, “Don’t you give out warnings?” “Yes, ma’am,” he replied. “They’re all up and down the road. They say, ‘Speed Limit 55.’”

In so many ways, we disregard the warning signs God has given to us. The 10 Commandments. The Golden Rule. The Second Coming. We deceive ourselves into thinking that such truths of Scripture are for everyone else, but not for us.

Remember how Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God?” God wants to break into our lives and fill us with his love, but without our willingness to truly open our hearts and receive him, such blessings are not possible.

Every Advent we are forced to deal with John the Baptist. In the midst of all the pretty Christmas light and beautiful trees, right smack dab in the middle of the Christmas parties and the wonderful smells of Christmas baking, John the Baptist knocks on our door, gets right in our face and yells, “REPENT!”

It always feels like John shows up to ruin all of our holiday festivities. He’s like the Grinch! I always want to say, “Lighten up, John! You crusty old party-pooper! It’s Christmas, for Pete’s sake!”

Believe it or not, John the Baptist is doing us a favor. He is reminding us that most of our preparations for Christmas don’t prepare us to receive the newborn King. It’s easy to see what all of us are doing to get ready for all of the “Tis the season to be jolly” stuff. We are all quite fond of all of the “fa-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la” festivities. But when it comes to getting ready to welcome Jesus into our hearts – the greatest gift of the season – we are far from prepared.

John the Baptist has the nerve to say to us this morning, “Yes, I know what you are doing to get ready for Christmas, but what are you doing to get ready for the birth of Christ? Yes, you know exactly what gift you are getting everyone for Christmas, but have you even stopped to think about the gift God will give to you?”

It’s as if God knows that it is all too easy for us to lose sight of the true meaning of this season and so he sends John the Baptist to shake us up a bit, to make us stop and think if any of the stuff we are doing this Christmas season is drawing our hearts closer to Christ.

Ask yourself, “Is anything I am doing this holiday season increasing my faith in God and my desire to serve Christ?” After all is said and done, will the only thing we really want for Christmas be to kneel at the manger and to offer a prayer of gratitude to God for sending his Son, Jesus?” Will that prayer even enter our minds this season? “Thank you God for coming to save us.”

If we do realize that our heart is not right with God, if we have lost sight of the true meaning of the season, notice that John the Baptist (God’s messenger) doesn’t pronounce judgment upon us. Rather, he proclaims words of hope and salvation. John reassures us by saying, “Repent, and God will forgive your sins.”

John is reminding us of an incredible truth: by God sending his Son to earth, God is choosing love. God is taking our salvation into his own hands to ensure that God can keep the promise he made to us the day we were baptized – that nothing will ever be able to separate us from God. Nothing. Not even if it means that God must take on human flesh.

Jesus will come whether we are ready to receive him or not. Why? Because God promised he would come, and God is true to his Word.

“The Messiah is coming,” John proclaims. He is coming so that we no longer have to walk alone through our trials and sufferings. He is coming to shine light into our darkness, to grant hope in the midst of despair, to save us from our sin. All will be well.

“The Messiah is coming,” John proclaims. “He’ll be here before you know it.”

Two candles on our Advent wreath burn brightly. Only two more to go. Are we ready?

Amen.