

RORATE COELI (ADVENT 4)

December 24 2017

Deuteronomy 18:15-19

Philippians 4:4-7

John 1:19-28

Standing...

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We gather this morning on the last Sunday in the penitential season of Advent,
yet at the same time, it's Christmas Eve.
Instead of rushing head long into Christmas—which we will do this evening,
let's slow down just a bit—
so that this season of Advent can fulfill its godly purpose in our lives.

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Sitting...

John the Baptist—

He received a divine call to set up a pulpit out in the desert—
calling the nation of Israel to repentance.

As the masses come out to hear him,
they realize John doesn't preach what people want to hear—
that they're okay and should keep up the good work.

On the contrary John cries,
"You're not okay. You're not good. Repent!"

The Jews were, for the most part, stuck on external things, earthly things.
They didn't notice how they were mistreating one another,
becoming more and more self-centered and selfish,
and more and more concerned about their government.
They didn't notice how their possessions,
their food, clothing, tithing
and religious rituals had lost their meaning.

Moreover, God's commandments were being reinterpreted to allow them to get away with whatever they wanted. The people of Israel had become either haughty and merciless toward their neighbor on the one hand, or secure, open sinners on the other.

In that condition,
they would never be ready for the Advent of Christ.

So, John preached against all of it: open sins and secret sins,
arrogance and works-righteousness.

The idolatry of possessions,
the idolatry of their own bodies and pleasures,
the idolatry of government,
and the idolatry of self.

He is the Lord's voice,
calling sinners to turn from their sin,
to turn from their unbelief,
turn from living in darkness of death and turn to Jesus.

John the Baptist makes us slightly uncomfortable, but he's fascinating.

No category seems to fit him.

He's not right wing or left,
conservative nor liberal.

So, you can't help but to go and see what he's all about.

Now look—this is the biggest opportunity of John's life.

I mean, he's the hottest preacher in the circuit,
people are gathered at his feet,

with even more coming out to hear him.

He is baptizing left and right—hearing everyone's confession.
These folks were ready to follow John anywhere.

Yet, what makes John so unusual—more so than his diet and clothing—
is John would never claim any glory for himself.

He knew what was at stake
and he will not be a hindrance to Christ.

So day after day, John gave the crowds the same old message,
the same old conviction—

you'd hear it every time you heard John preach.

"Make straight the way of the Lord!"

"Hear His Word!"

"Repent before it's too late!"

"The Lord is coming!"

"Let Him find you humbled!"

"Let Him find you penitent!"

"Let Him find you troubled and sorrowing over your sins!"

"Let Him find you acknowledging your guilt
and seeking His mercy when He comes!"

One day, a delegation from Jerusalem shows up—
coming to check out this desert congregation and preacher.

They ask, "Who are you, John—are you the Christ?" Many were no doubt looking for the Messiah. And as you know, their idea of the Messiah was a strong man, one who would come with power to establish Israel again and the throne of King David. Someone who would, "Make Israel great again!" Sound familiar? People love that kind of talk.

Some thought John fit the bill.

Plenty of rumors were circulating that John could indeed be the Promised One.

Yeah, he was a little unkempt—a little uncivilized—but he could be cleaned up. But John matter-of-factly tells the Jerusalem delegation, "I am not the Christ."

They press further. "What then, are you Elijah?"

Elijah lived hundreds of years before John,
but if you recall, Elijah never died.

He was taken to heaven alive, in a whirlwind, and a chariot of fire.

But the prophet Malachi said Elijah would reappear before the coming of the day of the Lord. Maybe John was Elijah...in camel's hair and leather.

John said, "I'm not Elijah." Even though he came in the spirit of Elijah,

The delegation asks, "Are you the Prophet?"

This question is rich with meaning. To understand it, you've got to go all the way back to Deuteronomy 18, where Moses spoke of a Prophet who would arise out of Israel, one greater than himself. Moses was talking about Jesus. But the delegation thought surely, it had to be John. John says, "That's not me either."

"We give up. But we've got reports to fill out John. We've got people at headquarters waiting for an answer. What gives you the right to tell people they're sinning against

God? To tell people to repent and you to announce the forgiveness of sins? Who are you?"

John says, "I am only a VOICE crying out in the wilderness,
 fulfilling Isaiah's words as the forerunner of Christ.
 I am not the Righteous One and I am not the promised Seed of Abraham.
 I am not the One who will judge the earth,
 nor am I the One who will rule at God's right hand over all creation.
 But, it's time—it's time to get ready to meet Him...
 because He's here.
 The real Messiah.
 The real Christ whom
 you must humble yourself before.

Humble themselves?

The Pharisees and priests weren't about to do that,
 nor would they be lectured by some nobody in the desert.
 They ask, **"Why then do you baptize if you're not the Christ,
 nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"**

John's answer was perfect:

**"I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do
 not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me,
 whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose."**

In other words, John says,

I'm not the one you should be worried about.
 Not only is the Christ coming but,
 He's already here and you don't know Him.
 He is the One to whom you will answer.
 He is the One who has come to save you sinners from your sins.
 But take heed.
 To refuse to repent and believe in Him,
 He will not be your Savior.
 He will be your Judge.

This is how John made straight the way for the Lord's first Advent.

So how is the way straight for His second Advent?

Well, John's preaching is still echoed by your pastors when they tell you that
 It all comes down to this:

What should happens is if you sin, you should die.

The lies you've spoken.
 The hate you've felt.
 The pain you've caused others.
 The unholy things you've done.
 If you sin, you should die.
 It's the law of the universe.
 It's the fair thing.

However, you never want a fair God.
 A fair God gives you what you deserve.
 You don't want that.
 You want an unfair God—a God who will find another way for you.

And it's precisely in this realization,
 this inability to make it on your own,
 that you hear John's voice and
 follow John's boney outstretched finger and see the Christ,
 the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
 And looking at Christ,
 you finally look outside of yourself to see that
 Jesus is the light.
 Jesus is the life.
 Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
 the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.
 And that means your sin, too. All of it.

Now—you are properly prepared
 to celebrate His first Advent at Christmas.

In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.

Standing...

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Standing...

Offertory...