

Mission Reflection

for the Season of Advent



Seafarers International House

Scripture

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness; and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be brought low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways shall be made smooth;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”¹

Message

Looks can be deceiving.

We understand John the Baptist had the unsettling appearance of an eccentric and recluse with no fashion sense and really strange eating habits. Yet John the Baptist was born into a priestly family. Moreover, his parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth, being reasonably prominent in Jerusalem and likely moved in the same social circles as Annas and Caiaphas, and maybe even Herod, Philip and Lysanias. So they surely had moments of mortification when their son decided to go *outré*, ridicule the community of Jewish nobility as a “brood of vipers” and admonish them to “bear fruits that befit repentance”.

Yet John the Baptist is highly regarded — “no one has arisen greater”.² Looks can be deceiving.

Then and now, however, we don’t deal well with people who look or act different from us. A wall is erected between “us” and “them”, and we tend to marginalize

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Then and now, however, we don’t deal well with people who look or act different from us. A wall is erected between “us” and “them”, and we tend to marginalize

“them” (e.g. the disabled, the poor, the foreigner). We discount the validity of their values, their opinions and their very dignity and worth.

So, about Advent: the season in which we are taught to watch and wait; and listen. That’s not easy today. In a broken world in which violence, whether by guns or by explosives and whether domestic or foreign, seems to intrude almost daily in our lives, how can we really listen past the white noise of fear and hatred? To whom do we listen? How can we really understand what life is like for other people if we move our mouths and harden our hearts before listening to them?

One suggestion for our Advent journey may be to focus on the infant Jesus, homeless, illegal and poor, born to refugee parents who don’t belong anywhere, born in the rhetoric of hate and judgment, born to turn things around, **teaching to forgive to infinity** and empathizing always with the sick, the imprisoned and the vulnerable.³

Listen. Can you hear the infant Jesus calling us? Listen, don’t speak.

Prayer

Lord, in this season of Advent, we seek to listen. Through the Holy Spirit, come to us and speak to our hearts. Remind us that extending hospitality to strangers is to entertain angels and not to shelter terrorists. Strengthen our faith and quell our fears. Amen

1. Luke 3:1-6
2. Matthew 11:11
3. Terri Mork Speirs, “Advent: Waiting and Wrestling”, *LIVING LUTHERAN BLOGS*, December 11, 2014

Postscript: At Seafarers International House, we reach out to and welcome seafarers, asylum seekers, human trafficking victims and others travelling in distress. We believe that’s what the infant Jesus has called us to do. Come visit us and see us.

Seafarers International House serves seafarers and immigrants with pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance, advocacy and prayer in the ports in Baltimore, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Philadelphia, and in an 84-room Guesthouse in Manhattan. The Guesthouse accommodates more than seafarers and immigrants. It’s available for church gatherings, civic groups and individuals in need of safe, affordable lodging. Our Guesthouse helps them accomplish their mission goals, and their patronage helps us accomplish ours. “Sleep Well By Doing Good.”

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