

IV ADVENT 2018

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

PHILIPPIANS 4.4-7 ST. JOHN 1.19-28



Is he the One...or should we be looking for someone else?

In last week's Gospel from Matthew we found John the Baptist sitting in jail. John was what we would call an itinerant preacher who went around teaching and preaching. He asked people to turn away from sin and darkness and start over...and to show they were serious about things...he asked them to get baptized with water.

Earlier, John had baptized his cousin, Jesus. Even after John and the others who were present heard God himself call Jesus his Son...John had his doubts about who Jesus really was. John sent some of his own followers to Jesus to ask him, "Are you the One...or should we be looking for someone else?"

Jesus told John's followers to go back and report to John what they had seen for themselves...the blind get their sight back, the lame walk again, those with skin conditions are cured, the deaf hear again, the dead are brought back to life, the poor hear the Good News...there is hope. Jesus identifies his work as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in Isaiah about the Messiah.

John the Baptist is the main character in today's Gospel reading from John. Jesus doesn't make an appearance in today's Gospel story at all. Instead, we see some priests and Levites from the Temple in Jerusalem coming to John the Baptist to ask him the same question John asked Jesus last week, "Are you the one...or should we look for someone else?"

John tells the priests and Levites they have it all wrong...he's just the messenger Isaiah wrote about almost 800 years earlier..."the voice of someone shouting in the desert...make a straight path for the Lord to travel."

John the Baptist identifies himself as Jesus' public relations guy...the forerunner with a message people needed to hear...it's the same message we need to hear and it is loud

and clear. What is John's message...PAY ATTENTION...GET READY...JESUS IS COMING...DON'T SET UP OBSTACLES IN OUR LIVES THAT WILL MAKE IT HARD FOR US TO WELCOME HIM ...TAKE ACTION AND GET OUR LIVES IN ORDER...NOW AND NOT LATER.

All throughout the Advent Season we have been talking about getting prepared, getting ready for the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. This is the Fourth and the last Sunday in the Advent Season. Tomorrow is Christmas Eve and the next day is Christmas Day.

If we take John the Baptist seriously...and we should...the best way we can prepare our hearts and minds and souls to welcome Jesus at his First Coming on Christmas Day...and prepare ourselves for his Second Coming...is to go back to the Collect for Advent Sunday.

The Advent Collect defines the Advent Season...and it is a prayer we should have been saying every day since Advent Sunday...

...God help us to put away dark things and walk as children of the Light that is Christ now...help us to remember his humble birth and his promise to return some day with the hope we will be with him forever in heaven.

This brings us back to the last-things-first theme we talked about on the First Sunday in Advent...death, judgment...we can't avoid either...heaven is our hope and hell is the alternative to heaven. Let's remind ourselves our faith isn't about doom and gloom, death and destruction...it's about hope for things to come. Advent is about embracing a culture of light and life through Jesus Christ.

In the Epistle reading...Saint Paul tells us to rejoice because Jesus is coming back some day. Rejoice means to be happy. Saint Paul then tells us knowing Jesus will return fills our hearts and minds with God's peace...an inner peace which surpasses our ability to fully understand...a peace the world cannot provide...because it comes from God...and he want us to experience it now.

Rejoice and be happy. Jesus is coming and he will be here soon. He is the ONE we have been looking for...we don't have to look for someone else.

