

Second Sunday of Advent
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev, Jason S. Glombicki
December 4th, 2016

We live in a world of endless voices. We hear the voices of our supervisor or board members direct us. We hear politicians say very different things. The media, researchers, doctors, therapists, and advertisers convince us to listen to them. Whom *do* we listen to? Is that a fake news story or is it accurate? Is that person spinning something for their own gain? Some of the voices grate. Others are shrill. Yet, today, one voice rings out in the wilderness.

Not only do we hear that John is in the wilderness, but we too are in the wilderness of Advent. In both Matthew and in this liturgical season we are in a time of transition. Here, we find the celebration of the incarnation is not yet manifest. The church is not yet fully decorated. We gather in between Thanksgiving and Christmas to analyze our lives, wonder about our dissatisfaction, and sit in the unknown. Here, we are in the wilderness.

In the biblical wilderness, John the Baptist embodied, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” With his voice, John the Baptist used the words of Isaiah to remind us that we are called to look back so that we might look forward.¹ Or, using the words of a famous quote, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

¹ Bartlett, David L. *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 1.* “Second Sunday of Advent: Matthew 3:1-12 -Pastoral Perspective.” pages 44-49.

Let's face it, though, we all repeat the past. We forget the past so easily as humans. For example, who can tell me exactly what you wore on Monday, or what you were doing on Friday at 2:06 p.m.? It's hard! We often need constant reminders.

It is helpful to remember that as we look at the religious leaders in Matthew. It's easy for us to sneer at the Pharisees and Sadducees. It's easy for us to look at *those* people as the entitled 1%. We think, "isn't it laughable for them to think that their ancestry makes them special. Just because they were born of a certain lineage doesn't make them God's privilege people." We can sit here and point fingers at them, but we are just like them. We live in a society that favors certain lineages as well. Instead our society uses skin color, social status, money, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity as indicators of favor. Worst of all, we buy into that structure. We forget our beliefs, and we repeat the same injustice.

Then, without even thinking about it, we turn to the news; we make CNN or Fox News or NPR or the Wall Street Journal our divine source of reality. We turn to politicians, clinicians, and friends as our moral authority. We listen to the voices in our head that tell us we're the only one struggling with depression and anxiety; we hear that wheezy voice say we're too fat, too ugly, and too unlovable; we let *that* voice strangle our ability to thrive after being separated from someone we love. We listen to so many voices in this world that we, like the religious leaders, forget and so we struggle to find our voice.

What do we do? We repent. I can hear you now, "Oh, Pastor Jason, that's so ... religious. You're a pastor. Of course, you'd say that." But before you check out and finish the grocery list in your head, hear me out – in fact, hear the voice of the past. Most of us think that repentance means saying you're sorry - that you're really, really sorry and will never ever do "it" again. That's a small part of it, certainly, but it's more than that.

You see, as theologian David Lose reminds us, repentance means turning around, starting over, taking another direction, or choosing another course. All these actions call into question the correctness of a present behavior. However, the emphasis of repentance is less on what is wrong with what we're doing now; it's more about what is helpful for us to do differently. It's not about shame and judgment, rather it is about awareness. Repentance is about awareness that what we say and do is not in line with God's voice of peace and equity for all people and for all creation.

Here's the thing, love, peace, justice, dignity, freedom, and abundance are dangerous. Jesus was crucified because of them. These ideals overturn our entire order and make us look deep at the truth of our own voice, and that is terrifying. In our world, you cannot make money while speaking peace. In our society, you cannot wield power while voicing justice. Humanity cannot control another with love. Our inflated self-image cannot be easily built upon dignity. Our need to be "better than another" cannot be lived out with a belief in abundance.

In John's society and in our world, the voice of God calls out in the transitional wilderness. The voice of God turns the world defensively upside down, for in our society love, peace, and justice feel like fire. In this world, dignity, freedom, and abundance are easily choked out by our own fatal venom. It's easier for us to climb the corporate ladder at any cost rather than look at its societal benefits. It's easier to endanger indigenous people's water sources rather than look at our own addictions and idols.

You see, true love and peace burns - it burns our money coffers and scars our ego. A life of freedom and abundance requires us to be drowned in the baptismal waters. An abundant life calls us to confess and die to our ego so that we might rise again in the grace and freedom of Christ. To be clear, that is not so that we melt into a puddle of guilt, but rather so that we become aware of

our own behaviors and compare them to the one voice that matters - the voice of God's justice and love which can never die.

That can feel pretty daunting though, right? I mean, to be aware of all the ways that we do not love God, love our neighbor, and love ourselves. We've got some work to do. Many of us think, "I don't have time for that! I'd rather hunker down in my current friend group with our similar biases and get back to watching my favorite television series." Yet, we've tried that before. We've completely ignored the other's view point so much so, that we walked away from a divisive election with a hoarse voice after screaming into social media and at are similar-minded friends. As my mother would say, "So....how's that working for you?"

No matter where you are on the political spectrum, we're in a wilderness – a time of transition. The image of wilderness calls to mind the Israelites who were freed from the oppression of Pharaoh and wandered in the desert. When they finally got to freedom, they immediately became concerned they would die. Yet there, in the wilderness, they began to hear the clear voice of God. It was in the wilderness they learned to trust God. So too, we will wander in a plurality of voices; yet, we know our God will continue to point forward.

That is why we gather here in this community each week. After seven days of being bombarded by the voices of the world we need to hear a clear voice of love and justice. Here we gather to find God's presence in both the font and the table. Here we see young and old, republican and democrat, queer and straight, black and white, Latino and Asian, rich and poor, unemployed and employed, single and married all gathered in these moments of love. We gather because we believe in the importance of the incarnation. We come together to pause and reflect on our lives, to be made aware of where we can repent, and turn to live out God's justice more fully.

Now, that's a tall order. We cannot do everything at once, but we can start with one action – just one. So, take a quick moment to daydream. Daydream like Isaiah did in our first reading. You're invited to dream of something beyond what we can presently see. Dream of justice, peace, abundance, freedom, and love. Dream of what that would look like. Take a moment to close your eyes and dream now.

With that dream in mind, identify one element where you individually or we communally could repent, a place where you want to turn a different direction, or, like we said during Theodore's baptism, think of a situation where you participate with the forces that oppose God's will. Think of a place where you could make that shift to live out your dream. Take a moment now.

Finally, is there a practice or habit that might produce a more abundant life for you or those around you?² How might you shift into that new reality? Take a moment to think.

Well, there it is. You've started the journey! The world is full of deceptive and honeyed voices. Sorting through the voices is complex. However, we as Christians are rooted in God's voice communicated through generations of faithful people. We can learn from them to explore abundant life. We align ourselves with God's actions to be messengers of justice, peace, and truth. We gather here each week to be reminded of God's presence in water, in bread, in wine, and in each other. We come together to hear the voice of God among us, for God is truly with us. Amen.

² <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/11/advent-2-a-reclaiming-repentance/>