

Fifth Sunday of Advent
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason S. Glombicki
December 8, 2019

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness.” It’s a phrase from today’s gospel that sticks out to me. It’s a quote from Isaiah. And, it’s a phrase that helps build a larger argument that we’ll experience over-and-over again as we study Matthew this year. For, Matthew is trying to build up Jesus’s connection to Judaism. In Matthew, Jesus is the messiah from David’s line, Jesus is the new Moses, and Jesus is Immanuel, meaning God with us. And, although it’s helpful to build this connection, I think this quote speaks to us something even deeper.

And, if you know anything about me, when I look at a text and I want to look deeper, it likely means I’m diving into the Greek. After all, the Christian Scriptures, or the New Testament, was not written in English (shocking, I know). When looking at it [the Greek], what is discovered is that the text says, “**A** voice shouting out for help in the wilderness.” (Mmm, this is going to be good.) It’s **a** voice. That is, one of many. Not the only voice. Just, a voice. That difference in the article makes a lot more sense to me and is so true of my experience.

After all, we live in a world with oh, so many voices. Flip on the news, and one voice claims that pursuing impeachment is a sham while another voice calls it justice. A mental health diagnosis given by one doctor is scoffed at by another. Holiday advertisers try to whisper in our ears sweet nothings about so-called needs that we never knew existed. The voices of Siri, Alexa, and Waze literally direct our every turn. And, far too often we listen to a cunning voice inside our head that says we’re too fat,

too ugly, and too unlovable. Or, we hear a voice trick us into believing that we're the only one struggling with depression and anxiety. And, we believe a voice that tells us that the loneliness, sadness, and loss we feel is only our fault. We listen to so many voices that we become distracted and deaf.

And, it's so easy to be drowned in these voices. Even religious leaders, present and past, fall into this distraction. After all, in today's reading we saw John quip back a response to a narrative he must have heard time-and-again. He reminded those leaders that no lineage, no ancestry, no privileged position can exempt you from God's purifying fire.

And, when you think about it, we are a lot like those religious leaders. For we exist and benefit from societal lineages and privileges. Our society gives access to resources, positions, and power to those who know the magic formula or the right person in power. The right skin type will give you a leg up. A well-defined male identity will communicate your strength. The favored social class will take you further. And, an opposite-gender loving relationship won't draw incessant critique. Pair those with European cultural norms; an appearance that isn't too old or too young; a white, English-as-first language dialect; experiences that are old enough to communicate wisdom but young enough to be "relevant"; and, then, sprinkle in an American born family that can, at least, pretend to be Christian. After you've prepared that idyllic formula, you, like the religious leaders, might believe that crafty voice that says, "God's favor is with you because of you."

But, in the midst of all of those shenanigans, there is another voice. It's a voice that is shouting out for help in the wilderness. It's a voice bellowing on the margins. It's a voice that yearns for the manifestation of God's straight pathways. Or, because I

don't do straight well, it's the voice that yearns for *God's* right way to become *the* way of choice.

And, as we continue reading, we'll discover that Matthew's author doesn't see a difference between Jesus's message and John's message. In fact, John announced the coming of God's reign (Matthew 3:2) with the exact same words that Jesus will use (Matthew 4:17, 10:7). And, God's way is announced with repentance.

Now, don't check out on me here. We Christians like to toss around a whole lot of loaded language. So, let's unpack the term "repentance." Rev. Dr. David Lose reminds us that the heart of repentance means "turning around" or "choosing another course." But, the emphasis of repentance is less on what is wrong with what we are doing now; instead, repentance is more about what is good, right, and important in what we are doing differently. That's because, repentance is rooted in a glimpse of God's beautiful vision and, then, wanting to partner with God's work by taking one small step towards living within God's vision. In short, repentance is realizing that you've been traveling one way, while noticing that God's vision is pointing another way, and then, changing course to align with God's voice.¹

So, the first step for us to understand the difference between God's voice and another other voice is to know God's voice more fully. That is, to recognize God's voice, we need continued exposure to God's voice. For, if you're anything like me, the world's many voices can quickly jumble God's voice. So, for me, I need to come to this place every week. I need to clearly hear God's voice claim Nico and you and me as valuable, loved, and wonderfully-made. To hear God's voice invite us into God's kingdom, or God's vision—a vision that isn't in some far-off distant land, but, rather, to hear that

¹ <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/11/advent-2-a-reclaiming-repentance/>

the kingdom of heaven is near. It's so near that we can touch it as this diversity group passes the peace. It's so near that we taste God's abundant gifts broken and poured out at this table. It's a vision that reminds us that our God sees a different world. A world where forgiveness rules, where honor is found in serving, where love reigns, and where we gain true wealth by giving it away.

So, as we sharpen our skills to hear God's voice, then, we are invited to survey our lives and recognize a step we can take, both individually and communally, to embody God's vision more fully. So, when we recognize that most of time we are served by others, then we can look for opportunities to serve as partners in God's vision by serving another. When we notice the voices of the world that quickly overpower those shouting out for help at the margins, then we use our voice to advocate for change in our systems that better support the poor, the vulnerable, and the stranger. For, God's voice echoes as we write our congress people about equitable policies for individuals who would go hungry without the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (what we used to call food stamps). We hear God's voice booming, when, as a congregation, we work to raise funds for our Advent Project so that local, domestic, and international siblings might have access to food and critical resources. We hear God's voice resound as we embody our baptismal call to work for justice and peace for all creation.

So, friends, these are today's gifts. For, a voice is shouting on the margins. A voice that calls us to remember God's voice. A voice that reminds us of abundant love and life given for all. A voice that invites us into God's work that is among us now. Amen.