

“Sent from God”

“There was a man sent from God.” Already, St. John the Evangelist has said a mouthful. Sent from God!!! One could really make some hay with credentials like that. Imagine how this man “sent from God” could use that to his advantage.

We live in a climate that puts a very high price on one’s status, and how you are seen by others. If you’ve put together a resume recently, you know how you try to come up with every possible achievement or award. If you’re active on social media, you know how you pay attention to the “likes” and the “number of followers” and “friends” that you have.

The temptation is to present yourself to the world in the best possible light – to make your way to the top of the ladder – and there’s nothing wrong with that. But do you set yourself upon a pedestal – attempting to be someone that others wish they could be? Do you present yourself as someone that you are not?

“Who are you?” That’s the question posed to this man “sent from God” – a question posed by some of the most respected and honored people of the day – the priests and Levites from Jerusalem.

“Who are you?” Imagine all the ways this man “sent from God” could have answered that question. He could have told the story about how he was miraculously conceived in his mother’s womb (even though his mother Elizabeth, was barren, and advanced in years). They had probably heard this wonderful news about their fellow priest, Zechariah, who finally had a son after all these years.

He could have simply recounted how “the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him” – how everyone was flocking to him – attracted (in part) by his choice of clothing, bizarre foods, and wilderness living.

But what was this man “sent from God” – SENT to do? He was sent to prepare the way of the Lord – to preach a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

When these highly respected and honored representatives ask, “Who are you?” – this “man sent from God” who we know as John the Baptist – answered in this way. “He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ.’”

Well then “who are you?” Are you Elijah? Are you the Prophet? That’s pretty flattering to be put in such good company. We like it when people think more highly of us than they should. But John says, “I am not.”

Well, if you’re not someone special, someone super-important – then why do you do what you do? “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” Now, the implication is that John is a nothing – and you know how that is when people think you don’t amount to much – you are tempted to over exaggerate who you really are.

But John is a “man sent from God” – “He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.”

John is a witness. He is a prophet – and as such, he preached what every Old Testament prophet preached, “repent!” But now he adds, “the kingdom of God is at hand.”

He warned of the lackluster faith that merely goes through the motions, warming the pew. He warned of trusting in the blood-line of Abraham – as if it could shelter one from the axe of God’s wrath, already laid at the root of the tree. He condemned their treatment of the poor, and the widows. He censured those who exhorted money from one another. He even called King Herod to repentance for his adultery.

John bore witness to the light – he “gave God’s people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins” (Lk. 1:77). He pointed people in repentance and faith to the Messiah, the Savior, Jesus. And finally, as a prophet, he received a prophet’s reward death.

John knows who he is – who has sent him – and what he has been given to do. He is the last and greatest of the Old Testament prophets. Jesus says that there is no one greater who has been born among women – and yet – He also says that the least in the kingdom of God is greater than John.

John was sent by God to be a witness to the light – to point the people sitting in darkness to Jesus Christ who is the light of the world. John boldly points to Jesus – proclaiming that He is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Into our world the voice of John the Baptist comes this morning. He is not a charismatic pastor, a “people-magnet” as I’ve heard some pastors refer to themselves. He doesn’t come with glitz and glamour – to attract people to a wildly successful congregation.

“I am not” that kind of witness, he would say. God has sent me to preach to you a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. I am here to point you to Jesus Christ – for He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. His blood alone redeems you from sin. His death alone, conquers your death – and His resurrection is the guarantee of the resurrection of your body to life everlasting.

Indeed, we need to hear John’s sermon – for we must confess that we are attracted to the bright and shiny and popular – even while we despise the common, lowly ways in which our Lord comes to us.

We need to have the way of the Lord prepared for us – our sinful nature drowned so that the new man living in humble, repentant faith – might receive Him who comes to wash away all our iniquity, making us to be a new creation.

We need to hear that preaching of forgiveness – freely given to us with Christ’s own Body and Blood – all so that we may have life and salvation.

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light” – so that YOU might believe in Jesus Christ, through him. Dearly beloved, let us give thanks and rejoice that God continues to come to us in these days – so that we may be rescued from the darkness of our sin and death – and live eternally in the Light of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.