

"A VOICE *STILL* CRIES IN THE WILDERNESS"
JOHN 1:6-8; 19-28
THIRD S. IN ADVENT
MESSIAH, BOERNE
DECEMBER 17, 2023

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT. AMEN.

READ TEXT: "THERE CAME A MAN WHO WAS SENT FROM GOD; HIS
NAME WAS JOHN. HE CAME AS A WITNESS TO TESTIFY
CONCERNING THAT LIGHT, SO THAT THROUGH HIM ALL
MEN MIGHT BELIEVE" (VV 6-7).

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

VARIOUS METAPHORES OR VERBAL COMPARISONS ARE MADE TO
DESCRIBE LIFE IN THE CITY. FOR EXAMPLE, SOME PEOPLE
DESCRIBE CITY LIFE AS A "REAL JUNGLE OUT THERE," PERHAPS
BECAUSE OF THE COMPLEXITIES OF URBAN LIFE. OTHERS DESCRIBE
LIFE IN THE CITY AS A "DOG-EAT-DOG WORLD," PROBABLY
REFERRING TO THE HIGHLY COMPETITIVE NATURE OF POST-MODERN
SOCIETY. BOTH THESE METAPHORES DESCRIBE CITY LIFE IN A
SOMEWHAT THREATENING WAY. ANOTHER METAPHOR FOR URBAN LIFE
IS AS A "DESERT" OR "WILDERNESS." THIS DESCRIPTION MIGHT
BE USED, FOR EXAMPLE, IN SPEAKING OF THE INNER CITY AT
NIGHT WHEN THERE ARE FEW SIGNS OF LIFE, ESPECIALLY
SPIRITUAL LIFE. THE LARGEST CITIES IN AMERICA CAN
CERTAINLY BE DESCRIBED THIS WAY. HOW ABOUT BOERNE, TEXAS?
AND CONSIDERING THE EMPTY SPACES ON THE PEWS THIS MORNING,
WHAT ABOUT MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH?

JOHN THE BAPTIZER WAS A MAN SENT FROM GOD TO A PEOPLE LAKING SPIRITUAL LIFE. HE CAME TO THE PEOPLE IN AND AROUND JESRUSALEM, AND UNDERSTOOD HIMSELF AS "THE VOICE OF ONE CALLING IN THE DESERT," OR WILDERNESS (V 23). JOHN'S GOD-GIVEN MISSION WAS TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD JESUS CHRIST WHO WAS COMING INTO THE WORLD. THIS PREPARATION TOOK PLACE WHEN PEOPLE RECOGNIZED THEIR DEEP SPIRITUAL NEED FOR A SAVIOR THROUGH SPIRIT-WORKED REPENTANCE AND FAITH AND TRUSTED IN JESUS AS THE MESSIAH, GOD'S ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON, SENT TO SAVE THEM. PEOPLE STILL NEED SUCH A SAVIOR. *WE* NEED SUCH A SAVIOR. THUS, AS WE CONSIDER THE *MISSION, FAITHFULNESS, AND HUMILITY* OF JOHN THE BAPTIZER THIS MORNING, LET'S ALSO RECOGNIZE GOD'S CALL FOR US TO BE "A VOICE" THAT "*STILL* CRIES IN THE WILDERNESS" RIGHT HERE IN AND AROUND BOERNE, TEXAS, RIGHT HERE AT MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH.

JOHN THE BAPTIZER WAS A MAN WITH A *MISSION*. AS I THOUGHT ABOUT THIS IDEA OF "MISSION," I KEPT THINKING ABOUT THE OLD T.V. SHOW AND THE MOVIES "MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE." HOW DIFFERENT WAS JOHN'S MISSION FROM THAT OF THOSE SPECIAL AGENTS ON THE IMPOSSIBLE MISSION TEAM! THEIR DIRECTIONS GENERALLY CAME TO THEM ON A TAPE THAT SELF-DESTRUCTED IN TEN SECONDS. JOHN'S DIRECTION CAME FROM THE WORD OF GOD

THAT "STANDS FOREVER" (IS 40:8). HE WAS TO GO TO THE DESERT, THE WILDERNESS REGION ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE JORDAN RIVER, WHERE THERE WOULD BE PLENTY OF PEOPLE AND WATER, AND "PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD" (IS 40:3). HE ACCOMPLISHED THIS MISSION BY GOING OUT TO THE MAIN TRAVEL ROUTE, THE SO-CALLED "KING'S HIGHWAY," ACROSS THE JORDAN RIVER AT "BETHANY-ACROSS-THE-JORDAN." THERE HE CALLED ALL PEOPLE TO REPENT OF THEIR SINS AND RECEIVE A BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. BY CALLING FOR SUCH A COMPLETE CHANGE OF HEART AND MIND IN JEWS AND GENTILES ALIKE, JOHN MADE "STRAIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS A HIGHWAY FOR OUR GOD" (IS 40:3).

GOD'S WORD ALSO GIVES US A SIMILAR MISSION: "GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND TEACHING THEM TO OBEY EVERYTHING I HAVE COMMANDED YOU" (MT 28:19-20). THESE WORDS OF JESUS WILL NEVER SELF-DESTRUCT. "SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE BROKEN," JESUS SAYS, AND "HEAVEN AND EARTH WILL PASS AWAY, BUT MY WORDS WILL NEVER PASS AWAY" (MK 13:31). JESUS' WORDS HAVE NO EFFECT, HOWEVER, WHEN WE DON'T PUT THEM INTO PRACTICE. JESUS WANTS US TO USE THEM. WE TOO CAN BE VOICES "CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD'" (IS 40:3).

NOW, YOU MAY BE SAYING TO YOURSELF, "SOME WILDERNESS, PASTOR. LA-Z-BOY RECLINING CHAIRS WITH REMOTE CONTROL COLOR T.V.'S IN HOMES WITH WALL-TO-WALL LUXURY, FROM CELLULAR PHONES AND MICROWAVE OVENS TO LATE-MODEL CARS AND AUTOMATIC GARAGE DOOR OPENERS." YET DESPITE OUR ALMOST HEAVENLY COMFORTS, WE LIVE IN A WORLD STILL POLLUTED BY PEOPLE'S INHUMANITY TOWARD EACH OTHER AND LAID WASTE BY SIN. WE LIVE IN A WILDERNESS IN NEED OF A VOICE, MANY VOICES, YOUR VOICE AND MY VOICE, TO PROCLAIM THE WAY OF LIGHT AND LIFE THROUGH THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST.

JOHN'S MISSION WAS SPECIFICALLY TO "TESTIFY CONCERNING THAT LIGHT, SO THAT THROUGH HIM [EVERYONE] MIGHT BELIEVE" (V 7). IN THE CITY THERE ARE MANY LIGHTS, ESPECIALLY DURING THE ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS SEASONS. AT NIGHT LIGHTS CAN BECOME QUITE CONFUSING, ESPECIALLY IF A PERSON DOESN'T KNOW WHICH LIGHT TO FOLLOW. IN FACT, IN THE CASE OF A TRAFFIC LIGHT, FAILURE TO FOLLOW THE CORRECT LIGHT CAN EVEN CAUSE A DEADLY ACCIDENT. IN VERSE NINE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL THE LIGHT ABOUT WHICH HE IS TO TESTIFY IS CALLED THE "TRUE" (NIV) OR "GENUINE" (NET) LIGHT TO DISTINGUISH IT FROM THE MANY OTHER "LIGHTS" OR FALSE PROPHETS IN JESUS' DAY. JOHN'S MISSION WAS TO SERVE AS A SECONDARY LIGHT, ONE WHO

RECEIVED ILLUMINATION FROM THE PRIMARY LIGHT, JESUS. BY BEARING WITNESS TO JESUS, JOHN WOULD SAVE EVERYONE WHO BELIEVED HIS TESTIMONY.

OUR MISSION IS LIKEWISE TO BEAR WITNESS TO JESUS AS THE SON OF GOD AND THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD. WE TOO ARE TO SERVE AS SECONDARY LIGHTS TO GOD'S LIGHT OF SALVATION SEEN IN JESUS CHRIST. IN GOD'S WORD WE HAVE RECEIVED JOHN THE BAPTIZER'S TESTIMONY CONCERNING JESUS. JUST AS IN A COURTROOM WE ARE TO TELL "THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH, AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH," SO ALSO IN OUR WITNESS TO OTHERS, WE ARE NOT TO *ADD TO* OR *DETRACT FROM* JOHN'S WORDS OF TESTIMONY. INSTEAD, WITH FULL CONFIDENCE, WE CAN ACCEPT JOHN'S WORDS CONCERNING JESUS AS TRUE AND SHARE HIS WITNESS WITH OTHERS. YOU AND I ARE GOD'S CHOSEN MESSENGERS, HIS AMBASSADORS, CARRYING A MESSAGE OF LIGHT AND LIFE TO A SINDARKENED WORLD, BRINGING IT LIGHT AND LIFE THROUGH JESUS.

JOHN WAS *FAITHFUL* AND *HUMBLE* IN CARRYING OUT HIS GOD-GIVEN MISSION OF TESTIFYING ABOUT JESUS. WHEN THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS HEARD ABOUT THE BAPTIZER'S ACTIVITY AT THE JORDAN RIVER, THEY SENT "PRIESTS AND LEVITES" TO INVESTIGATE. CURIOSITY AND CONCERN FOR THEIR *OWN WELFARE* AS SUBJECTS OF ROME, *NOT* RECOGNITION OF THEIR PERSONAL NEED FOR REPENTANCE AND SALVATION, PROMPTED THE SENDING OF THIS

OFFICIAL FACT-FINDING DELEGATION FROM JERUSALEM TO THE JORDAN. THE QUESTIONS THEY ASKED JOHN REVEAL THAT THEY MISUNDERSTOOD THE PROMISES OF GOD IN THE SCRIPTURE.

ON THE OTHER HAND, JOHN HAD *NO DOUBT* CONCERNING *HIS* GOD-APPOINTED MISSION. WITHOUT HESITATION HE REJECTED ANY NOTION THAT HE MIGHT BE THE PROMISED MESSIAH. HIS WORDS TO THE DELEGATION WERE A REJECTION OF ANY FALSE CONCLUSIONS PEOPLE MIGHT MAKE CONCERNING HIS LIFE AND MISSION. JOHN HAD COME INTO THIS WORLD SIMPLY TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD JESUS BY FAITHFULLY PROCLAIMING THE LORD'S ARRIVAL. DESPITE MUCH HARDSHIP AND DISCOURAGEMENT, JOHN *FAITHFULLY* POINTED PEOPLE TO JESUS, THE LAMB OF GOD, WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD (V 29). SUCH FAITHFULNESS TO CHRIST—FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE—IS *STILL* A PRIMARY MARK OF DISCIPLESHIP.

IN ADDITION TO BEING FAITHFUL, JOHN WAS A *HUMBLE* SERVANT OF THE LORD. HIS HUMILITY IS MOST CLEARLY REVEALED IN HIS WORDS CONCERNING HIS UNWORTHINESS TO UNTIE JESUS' SANDALS. LOOSING THE THONG OF A SANDAL WAS THE TASK OF A GENTILE OR NON-JEWISH SLAVE IN ISRAEL. IT IS WRITTEN THAT A RABBI'S DISCIPLE WAS TO PERFORM EVERY SERVICE FOR HIS MASTER *EXCEPT* THE LOOSING OF HIS SANDLE THONG. JOHN SELECTED THIS TASK THAT JEWISH TEACHING STRESSES AS TOO

MENIAL FOR ANY DISCIPLE TO PERFORM AND DECLARES HIMSELF UNWORTHY TO PERFORM IT. ALTHOUGH SIX MONTHS HIS ELDER AND, THEREFORE, ACCORDING TO JEWISH CUSTOM IN A SUPERIOR POSITION, JOHN DECLARED HIMSELF UNWORTHY TO PERFORM THE MOST MENIAL TASK FOR THE ONE WHO WAS TO COME AFTER HIM. HUMILITY COULD SCARCELY TAKE A LOWER PLACE THAN THIS.

OUR GOSPEL LESSON ENDS WITH THE NOTE THAT JOHN'S MINISTRY TOOK PLACE "AT BETHANY ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE JORDAN" (V 28). JOHN CALLED ALL PEOPLE TO REPENTANCE IN THAT DESERT REGION IN ORDER TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. "CONFESSING THEIR SINS," MATTHEW TELLS US, "[JOHN] BAPTIZED ALL WHO REPENTED WITH A BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS" (MT 3:11). BY THE TRUE LIGHT OF HIS TESTIMONY CONCERNING JESUS, JOHN BORE WITNESS TO THE GENUINE LIGHT THAT ENLIGHTENS AND GIVES SPIRITUAL LIFE TO ALL HUMANKIND.

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST, GOD GRANT THAT *WE ALSO* MAY BE FAITHFUL WITNESSES TO JESUS HERE AT MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH IN THE REGION OF BOERNE, TEXAS. LET US HUMBLE OURSELVES AS GOD'S FAITHFUL SERVANTS AND PERFORM THE MISSION HE ASSIGNS TO EACH OF US IN OUR PARTICULAR CALLINGS IN LIFE. LET'S SHARE THE GOOD NEWS OF SPIRITUAL LIGHT AND LIFE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST WITH OTHERS. THEN, RATHER THAN A WILDERNESS,

LET'S WATCH GOD'S GARDEN GROW-UP AND OUT; IN JESUS' NAME.

AMEN.