



Proclaim the Good News

Luke 3:7-18

The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

December 13, 2015

Thought for the First Week of Advent

Scriptures: Zephaniah 3:14-18 • Philippians 4:4-7 • Luke 3:10-18

I always look forward to the Third Week of Advent each year, mainly because we are introduced to the last of the great prophets, John the Baptist. I like him for the contrarian character that he is. He beats people up, figuratively. One will not escape John's wrath, whether one resides in First Century Palestine or in our own Twenty First Century. We may not like John's "attitude" or the way he chooses to dress but we will have to admit that he answers questions bluntly and straightforwardly. "What should we do?" one person asks. "Here's what you should do, listen up," he says. So it goes. People asked questions and got answers. People never went away from John's preaching puzzled.

Here I must interject a John the Baptist character from modern film, Dewey Euliss, played by that great actor, Robert Duval. The film is titled *The Apostle*. Dewey Euliss is a "laid back" North Texas pastor of a large church. He has no problems; he's the senior pastor with tenure. All goes well for Sonny: He preaches fiery rhetoric but never asks hard questions. There are no significant questions to be asked; everyone is quite content with life.

Until...one day the whole world changes for Sonny Euliss. In a furious confrontation with the church's youth minister who just happens to be having an "affair" with Sonny's wife, Sonny clubs him over the head with a baseball bat.

So, with the dark cloud of God's anger hovering over him, Sonny hits the road across Bayou country, attempting to rediscover his lost career. All the while he hopes to find a church that will be attracted to his style of preaching. After much back road walking and sweating he finds a small ramshackle building that had, indeed, once been a church. "Ah, here it is," Sonny says; "I'll git me some folks, white or black, and we'll fix 'er up."

Interestingly, however, the only folks who show up to fix the church are sincere, religious "black folks" from the Bayou. So, now, Sonny needs to adapt his fiery style to such folks if he is going to have a congregation. After only a short time, those good folks begin to come and, much to Sonny's satisfaction, they love his preaching. He feels redeemed for his misdeed.

One day, however, precisely in the middle of one of Sonny's inspiring sermons, the long arm of the law appears in the vestibule of the church. He's been found out and off to jail he goes, leaving his congregants without pastor or preacher. End of story, as far as we know.

As I have already mentioned above, I think of Sonny Euliss as a modern-day John the Baptist. John, as we learn in the gospel had no fear in answering questions about the shape of life. Being moved (scared) by his preaching, they would say, "What should do?" John would say, "Well, if you have enough clothes, give some away. If you have enough food, share it with your neighbor. See, it's just that simple!"

Given all that, it appears to me that we have one of those situations where, if you don't want to hear the answer, don't ask the question: Don't cheat, don't practice extortion, don't accuse others of falsehoods, be satisfied with your wages. Immediately, we might say, "Well, those answers surely fit our times so well. Just read the daily newspaper."

Scripture scholars maintain that the questions put to John the Baptist probably were also coming from the early Christians. They were waiting (An Advent word!) for the Messiah and they wanted to know what they should do if and when he came. Perhaps some of those early Christians were slackening in their original Christian spirit, who knows.

All that, of course, invites us to ask questions about the age in which we live. Like the early Christians, we are also living the

in-between-times, the times between the first coming of Christ and His final coming. Scripture scholars call this “delayed eschatology.”

There is no doubt, however, that we Christians of this age are asked to think globally and act locally. Every act of justice is always local.

Therefore, we may ask how we feel about the Christian spirit in our neighborhood, church community or, even more broadly, what we think about the political situation of our country. What can we do to confront issues of social justice and peace? Is there anything at all that we are truly and deeply concerned about in terms of Christian life here and now.

Questions about life, of course, are always facing us and they’re always challenging, but they have to be asked. Questions about human life going on around us are always changing according to time, history and culture. Christian life happens amidst such a background; it does not exist in a vacuum. Christian questions always arise out of worldly situations.

John the Baptist answered questions about situations arising out of First Century Judaism. Our questions will be somewhat the same but also different. As long as Jesus delays his final coming, it is our task to continue asking questions while we wait for answers about today and tomorrow, until that moment in human history when there will no more questions: It’s called Heaven’s Reign.

Prayer for Peace - Guinea-Bissau

O God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, we thank you for knowing us and loving us beyond our capacity to imagine. During this season of Advent, help us be more keenly aware of your presence and your healing peace.

Forgive us when comfort leads to complacency and when selfish pride clouds our awareness of the needs of those around us. Help us respond to your call for us to live your message of hope and peace for all creation.

We pray for the people of Guinea-Bissau this day. Move in the hearts of their leaders that they may consider the welfare of all people and do that which is good for all.

Move within and among us, and strengthen us with your Spirit so our lives may be living sanctuaries of peace spiraling outward into the world.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Stewardship Thought

“Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.” (Philippians 4:6-7)

Paul reminds us that our God is an abundant God,
the ultimate giver of gifts.

He promises to give us all that we need.

When we trust that God will take care of us,
it is easier for us to share what we have been given.