



Large and Startling Figures | Rev Tim Frickenschmidt | December 08, 2019

Old Testament Reading [Isa 11:1-4, 6 and 9](#)

11¹ There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
2 And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
3 And His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what His eyes see,
or decide disputes by what His ears hear,
4 but with righteousness He shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
and with the breath of His lips He shall kill the wicked.
...
6 The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.
...
9 They shall not hurt or destroy
in all My holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

Epistle Reading [Rom 15:4-7](#)

15⁴ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. ⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Gospel Reading [Matt 3:4-12](#)

3⁴ Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.
⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.
¹¹ "I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, Whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing floor and gather His wheat into the barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."

Introduction

John the Baptist confronts us, Christians, every Christmas; we've learned that he just doesn't fit with all of our holiday cheer, but he is a central figure in Advent. John the Baptist's role in Advent reminds us that life isn't always fun, fun, fun. This time of year the difference between the church and the world is most evident. The question is why? Three points: (1) the mood, (2) the emphasis and (3) the Man.

Background

1. The Mood (that John creates).
 - a. John's attire (camel's hair) and diet (locusts and wild honey) were cheap, simple and humble; signs John was not concerned with the things of this world.
 - 1) [Matt 6:25](#) "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"
 - 2) Jesus tells us not to be anxious. [Matt 6:33](#) "But, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Advent can help relieve some of the season's anxiety, because it has a Lenten quality to it. We should be taking things off, living more simply like John.
 - b. John's volume is loud, accusatory, critical. [Matt 3:7](#) "You brood of vipers!"
 - 1) Speaking especially to Israel's national leadership: the Pharisees (grass roots, spiritually serious, fought for truth over relationships, resistant to change) and Sadducees (insiders, powerful, clergy, rich, fought for relationships over truth, capitulated to Rome, embraced change). By speaking to both groups he unites them in what they have in common: their brokenness.
 - 2) Ancient church father, Rabanus, said people speak loudly for three reasons: when other people are distant, deaf or angry. At times God must speak loudly to us; John the Baptist is God turning up the volume. To make your vision apparent when speaking to a hostile audience, one must resort to shock: to the hard of hearing, you must shout; and to the almost blind you must draw large and startling figures. John is God's large and startling figure.
 - c. The mood around John is urgent.
2. The Emphasis (that John makes in his message).
 - a. Change is necessary, for everyone.
 - b. Notice these images: v10 an axe, v12 a winnowing fork and vv10&12, fire; all agents of change. John says when Jesus comes, he's coming with agents of change and that He, Himself, will be an agent of removal/change.
 - c. Flannery O'Connor's character Manley Pointer in [Good Country People](#), a bible salesman, embodies everything Holga hates about good country people, but he seduces her. Then, he abandons her, leaving her alone. The point is we are Holga; we each have parts of us that need to be removed (sin; false objects of worship; corruptions we have come to see as normal). Change is necessary and urgent because God is coming to us as an agent of change to change us.
3. The Man (is the Hope)
 - a. Jesus will arrive with agents of change and judgment for all. In [Matt 23:33](#) Jesus (like John) confronts the Pharisees and Sadducees as being a brood of vipers but, then in [Matt 27:32-55](#) it is Jesus on the cross (followed by His redemption).
 - b. In the Christian faith, judgment and redemption always come together; and that's the Good News and the Hope for us (He has been judged for us).
 - c. Jesus' love and sacrifice for us can lead us to true repentance; not in just asking for forgiveness but in actually changing our lives to bear fruit in our repentance.

Discuss

1. Discuss John the Baptist's central role in Advent.
2. Discuss how/why the mood around John the Baptist is urgent.
3. Discuss how we can achieve true repentance. And, why especially during Advent?
4. Discuss Isa 11:1 – ...a shoot from the stump of Jesse ... a branch from his roots...

Conclusion/Application

•Prepare for Jesus' coming by taking off anxiety, frustration and anger and putting on thankfulness, love, patience and humility – let joy return to our lives.