Dec. 31, 2017 Christmas 1

John 1:19-34 John the Baptist questioned; says he is not the Christ or Elijah. (Psalm 32:1-2)

NRS Psalm 32:1 <Of David. A Maskil.> Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

 2 Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

**PRAYER OF THE DAY Glorious God, Help us to hear when your chosen voices proclaim the work of your son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns in this world and the next. Amen.**

HYMNS Cold December flies away ELW 299 There’s a voice in the wilderness ELW 255 CHORAL Nunc dimittis, Rene Clausen

Announcements prayers

 Kathy Zerbe is out of hospital!

Sermon:

What are you looking for in 2018? {ask, prepare folks in ppt}

When Jesus was about 30 years old… yes, time flies when you’re having fun! We celebrated the birth of Jesus last Sunday and already the Pharisees are asking questions… but they are not asking Jesus. In fact they do not even know of Jesus yet… in today’s passage the Pharisees sent the priests and Levites (those who officiated in the Temple worship and those who studied the scriptures and taught Faith formation classes)… These were the ones sent to discover the real identity of John the Baptist!

Their questions help us to understand what these believers were looking for at the time:

Are you the Messiah? – is a clue that at least these Jews are looking for a strong political leader, one who will lead them out of oppression to the freedom of deliverance! One from the House of David the King, restoring the mighty throne that has been vacant for so very long! {Isa 9:6-7} *For a* ***child*** *has been* ***born*** *for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

 *7 His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

 And John the Baptist bursts that bubble – I AM NOT the Messiah

 This gospel of John, the beloved disciple (not to be confused with John the Baptist); is centered around signs. Looking for signs to answer exactly this question. Who is the Messiah? Because the people know, God promised a Messiah, an anointed one to rule, to establish and hold a kingdom with justice and righteousness. We can see in hind-sight that Jesus did establish a new kingdom… but it was not in Israel… it was a kingdom of God brought to earth and to the inhabitants of earth. It was a breaking-in of the divine into the created order. Not what anyone was really looking for!

Are you Elijah? The one who brought the Word of the LORD with healing and hope with restoration of the human and divine relationship? {Malachi 4:1-6} *~~Malachi 4:1 See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.~~*

 *~~2 But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.~~*

 *~~3 And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.~~*

 *~~4 Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.~~*

 *5 Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes.*

 *6 He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.*

 Jesus does accomplish some of this; yet not in a way people of that day would recognize. Arrogant and evildoers were not immediately toppled… in fact they did have many more generations to follow. Yet there was a lifting up of the lowly, some rough ways were made smooth, such as the Way that Jesus paved. Not an easy way, but certainly a smooth way… a clear way of living according to the Word of God. That Word did sometimes drive a wedge between parents and children (ie Mt 10:37-38) But then look what Jesus accomplished! God incarnate did turn the heart of the ultimate parent to their children… God already claims each one in the birth, life, death, burial and resurrection of Christ Jesus! And still we are in the not yet… because there are so many children’s hearts who are not yet turned to God.

 And John the Baptist bursts that bubble – I AM NOT ~~Elijah~~

Are you the prophet (Moses)? The one whom God called directly, and guided, and fed, and gave the commandments? {Deuteronomy 18:15-19} *15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet.*

 *16 This is what you requested of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: "If I hear the voice of the LORD my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die."*

 *17 Then the LORD replied to me: "They are right in what they have said.*

 *18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command.*

 *19 Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

 And we are held accountable for the commandments we break. We are held accountable for when we act with injustice and oppress those who struggle in daily-life. We are not perfect. In fact we are far from it… and look what God does here… God says you are worth it in my eyes, to make a sacrifice, to wipe the slate clean, your debts created by sin are paid-off, you are forgiven by the Lamb of God in the flesh. You are mine! And I AM your God.

 And John the Baptist bursts that bubble –instead of ~~I AM NOT the prophet~~. This is a simple ‘No’

John is NOT what those in this religious community are looking for! In fact he is so different that the expected answer to God’s promises… they don’t even know what to do with him. So they ask more questions…

* Who are you
* What do you say about yourself
* And why on *earth* are *you* baptizing! If you are nobody special?!

John the Baptist quoted Isaiah 40… John is the one plowing the snow from the road so that others may have traction and proceed along the way. John the Baptist is the one holding the red-stop sign in the construction lane, to caution, to prepare, to re-direct all who are on the way. John is the one outside of town, calling people away from security, away from the accepted community inside the city walls… John is calling people to level…

*Isaiah 40:1 Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.*

 *2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.*

 *3 A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,* ***make******straight*** *in the desert a highway for our God.*

 *4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.*

 *5 Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

The NEXT day John gives a clear, shining example of a straight way, a straight answer… and it is NOTHING like anyone is looking for!

This mighty one who is coming; this long expected fulfillment of the Divine promise… all the security, and power, and restoration… is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

☹ UGH, no one is looking for a sacrifice. No one is looking for a simple animal. No one expects the power of the almighty creator to be manifest in a lamb… the embodiment of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of sins removed from one body by the life of another.

What are you looking for in 2018? What are we looking for in 2018?

Well, maybe we need some of John’s preaching… repent, change heart, change direction, prepare the way (for someone else, we may not even recognize as God in our midst)

What does this mean for us today?

First it shows what God is looking for. God is looking to renew, to forgive, to re-connect.

 See in John’s gospel John 1:29 this lamb takes away the SIN of the world. Singular! In John’s gospel sin is NOT a list of wrongs done… no, instead sin, is a separation from God. A broken relationship. An alienation.

The Lamb came to remove that sin, to take it away, by sacrifice, … *He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, (Deut 18 and But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. (Malachi 4) imagine a calf released from domestic servitude, released from it’s likely role as a sacrifice.*

Wow, what amazing grace! No wonder John was out telling everyone about this surprising divine promise fulfilled. Truth is too good to be kept to ourselves… and too surprising to be recognized even by people already familiar with the religious community. Some recognize the sings and some do not.

The Pharisees see the signs and ask questions, but they are looking for a different set of answers, and ultimately misinterpret the signs… going on to sacrifice the Lamb of God rather than to receive that divine grace and mercy; the Lamb embodies.

On the other-hand, John-the-baptist’s father was a priest… he’s an insider too, the difference is that he is in touch with this new thing that God is doing… he is open to this surprising reality… (not immediately, remember he was struck dumb between the time the angel told him about his son’s role until his son was born to Elizabeth)… yet ultimately Zechariah believes that his son John the Baptist will witness to the mighty act of God in Christ Jesus the Messiah who is + sacrificial love; not military might, nor a new throne, nor an external relationship… no, + Messiah is God’s move inside, inside hearts, inside minds, inside the brokenness, the alienation, the space of secrets and unspoken pains… inside the wounds, and inside the misplaced hopes and trust… making all things new.

God is doing something totally new here in 2018! Ready for the Lamb?

Ready to repent? And make Way in our lives?

Snow beautiful covers all with clean white blanket.

But to go anywhere… its best to clear the snow, to exchange the beauty for traction

John 1: 19 This is the testimony given by John when the Jews ***sent priests and Levites*** from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

 20 He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah."

 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No."

 22 Then they said to him, "Who are you? **Let us have an answer for those** who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

 23 He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said.

 24 Now they had been sent ***from the Pharisees***.

 25 They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?"

 26 John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you **stands one whom you do not know,**

 27 the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal."

 28 This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

 29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who **takes away the sin of the world**!

 30 This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'

 31 I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, **that he might be revealed to Israel."**

 32 And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.

 33 I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'

 34 And I myself have seen and have testified that **this is the Son of God**."

Working preacher:

This is a story that begins with questions (rather than a proclamation/pronouncement)

Questions expecting Gods promise to be fulfilled… ask the questions! No keep silent

* End malachi – Elijah come again
* Deut 18 – moses
* King david’s line

Then listen! No pronouncements still…

What are you looking for? In 2018… {ask}

* political
* Hope healing reconciliation

I am vs I am not

Who will we be in relationship to jesus?

What is our response to jesus? {snow shovel image}

Witness

Jesus son of god… lamb of god… no one is looking for that!

Not the scape goat! Rather the lamb!!

Sin in John is separation from god… alienation/estrangement… Jesus restores the relationship!

SIN is singular not a list of bad stuff

John observes the baptism – doesn’t baptize Jesus?

This relationship is for you!

1. *emphasis added* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)