

## 2 Advent C

Malachi 3:1-4

Luke 1:68-79

Philippians 1:3-11

Luke 3:1-6

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Grace and peace to you from Jesus.

At the risk of opening up a can of worms, what do you cry out for? Because I think we'd likely have long list of hurts that rub raw or hopes that have run unfulfilled or dreams that have fizzled. To simply name it, life is complicated. Perhaps that's partly why, when we're asked "how are you?" we jump to our safe reply, "oh, good! Good! And you?" and we all know that the question isn't really meant to be answered, but is a polite greeting, and that is ok.

Among all the components that are compiled into this complicated life, we hear today of John, a man of deep and fervent faith who came into the world even before Jesus. There are some pretty sensational stories about John, even sensational stories about him before he was born. In Luke 1:68-79, which stands in place of our Psalm today, Luke records the song of John's father, Zechariah.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were well on in their years. And when they received the news that Elizabeth would have a son, in the midst of their joy and excitement, Zechariah was struck silent. Couldn't say anything and everybody sensed that God had done something. For the whole term of Elizabeth's pregnancy he couldn't speak a word - until the moment John was born. What we hear in Luke 1 is Zechariah's first words, his heartfelt song of praise, of joy, of excitement, of gratitude! His first words are an offering back to God for the birth of his son.

In Luke 3 we fast forward to John's adulthood where we catch the first glimpse of his odd and determined ways as a messenger of God. Luke wants to be sure that everyone knows, this was no ordinary person, and no ordinary message, but filled and fueled with divine inspiration. All these ingredients cry out, "Listen!" "Pay attention!"

**"Listen!"** (by Rev.,. Trish Schmermund)

John cries for justice

to a people who cannot hear.

John points the way

to a people fearful of movement.

Messengers sent, messengers calling,  
emails, texts, phone calls, news blasts,  
sermons, songs, Bible texts all declare,

“Listen!”

But the drone of mall music,  
the chimes of online purchases and  
delivery notifications  
take precedence.

We plan and wrap and  
bake and decorate with  
determined execution,  
as if Christmas wouldn't come  
without shortbread or glass bobbles  
or one

more

gift

card.

We send greetings in glittery cards  
with glossy-rose-coloured messages,  
deceitful of what we are really  
feeling or going through.

John received the Word,  
he was steeped in it,  
his parents lived it,  
he baptized people for it.  
And with God's arrival imminent,  
John had work to do:  
give the valleys of grief hope,  
make commonplace  
the mountains and hills of ego and power,  
straighten the crooked ways of hunger and denial,  
call out and name  
the injustice of apathy for what it truly is.

God is coming.  
God will stir us.  
God will piss us off until we want no more.  
God will not give up nor be forgotten.  
The day will be when all people,  
flesh and bone, crepey old or newborn skin,  
brown, black, yellow, red,  
church-goer or not,  
will see the justice and the  
uncomfortable side of Love.

That will be a day of deliverance,  
rescue, recovery, escape, a day of salvation.  
That day is today.  
God is here.  
And it is good, very good.

Welcome to Advent...

...an opportunity to listen to the invitation that calls us to move closer to a life with God, move closer to a life that was called "good" all the way back in Genesis 1.

As Remy was baptized this morning, we all stand in hope with him and his family. We always do baptisms in a public worship service, together as a church family, so that we can all be reminded of our own baptism and God's promises.

With God's love for us secure, John asks us to take a close and honest look at our lives for all that gets in the way between us and God. It's that *good long look in the mirror* type moment where we courageously decide to not gloss over our faults and the fear of unacceptance beside them. It's a time to name what we'd like to be different, a "do over" to start a new path, to recommit to something whole, welcoming, different. It takes courage to make such an assessment, and even more to take action.

There are many stories out there of people doing just that. They are pretty inspirational. At the same time however, it might seem more doable to make small changes that grow and build over time. I am privileged to see this often in speaking with many of you. I have seen the difference that has been made in families, in individuals, in marriages, in extended families, at work simply because someone has made a new effort to reach out, to forgive, to listen, to forego judgment, to accept, to heal, to talk, to pray.... and I assure you that as we do even what seems to be small actions paths are straightened, valleys are filled, mountains are leveled, crooked ways made straight, rough places smooth and a way is made for us to see a bit more clearly the God who is and always has been present.

In communities too, when we're willing to examine what ails us, then we can begin to heal together. The John-style truth-telling that we hear these days is an Advent call for change; the wilderness voices crying ask for us to listen to what impacts us all even if we are not directly affected. I know we've all heard about the opioid crisis, the unveiled history of First Nations peoples and settlers, cries for justice from people of color, the naming of white privilege, an epidemic of gun violence, the rapid deterioration of the health of this planet. We need not fear

these movements, but need to listen as if the voices were from John himself. Listening (rather than defensiveness or dismissal) is when the work of change begins.

So, how are you? Really, *how are you?* Change can start with something as simple as this age-old question asked in sincerity and answered courageously. Find the moments or places or people where you can let down your guard, take a risk and remember that God is there between you. Amen.