

“Messenger” Sermon for December 17, 2017

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11, Psalm 120, John 1:6-8, 19-28
John 1:23 John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare for the way of the LORD. Make straight the way for the Lord.’”

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One Saturday morning a pastor was preparing his sermon while trying to give equal time to his preschool son. It was a rainy day, and the boy was restless and bored, with little to do. Finally, in desperation, the pastor picked up an old magazine and thumbed through it until he came to a large brightly colored picture. It showed a map of the world. He tore the page from the magazine, ripped it into little pieces and scattered the scraps all over the living room floor with the words, “Son, if you can put this page together I’ll give you a dollar.”

The pastor hoped that this might take his son most of the morning, but 10 minutes later there was a knock on his study door. His son had completed the puzzle. The pastor was amazed to see that his son had finished so soon, with the pieces of paper neatly arranged and the map of the world back in order.

“Son, how did you get that done so fast?” “Oh, said the boy, it was easy. On the other side, there was a picture of a man. I just put a piece of paper on the bottom, put the picture of the man together, put a piece of paper of top and then turned it over. I figured that if I got the man right, I would get the world right.” His father handed his son a dollar.

‘If we are right, our world will be right.’” John the baptizer brought the message to Jerusalem in some of the most troubling objective social conditions in its history: If you are right then your world will be right.

What does it mean to be “right”? “Right” is an adjective that means “morally or socially correct or acceptable”, “agreeing with the facts or truth”; “speaking, acting, or judging in a way that agrees with the facts or truth”.

We have a choice before us. A human society can decide what is morally or socially correct or acceptable for it. In fact, we learn from sociology that our personalities develop as we are “socialized” into the mores and folkways of the society, the family and group that we live in. John challenged the people in the words of Dr. Phil by asking: “Well, how’s that workin’ for ya?”

John’s message was clear, “Prepare for a new value system; prepare for an entirely different set of mores and folkways. Be baptized in accordance with God’s ways, God’s thoughts, God’s direction as an alternative to all you have been socialize into as a human being. Get ready for a change in personality.

This requires changing our minds. It requires redirection, choosing God's alternative over our behavior, our ideas, our thinking and the plans we make for our existence. They wanted to know from John, "Are you the Christ?" He responded, I am a messenger. The message is: "Prioritize God's way, accept God's way, consider, God's way and prepare to live God's way."

If we accept God's change, this Advent, we can create a new world. We cannot decide what God's way is for others. What we can do is be messengers and declare, "Take the opportunity to choose God's way. It is life and health and power and hope and joy forevermore." Amen.