

Luke 3: 1-6
December 6, 2009 Advent 2
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Last week our gospel reading had us looking for signs of the coming Messiah. I can't help but be reminded of a 70's song when I think of that passage. You know the one signs, signs everywhere there's signs blocking up the scenery...Advent is a time of looking for signs. One of the verses of that song goes like this:

"And the sign said long-haired freaky people need not apply, so I tucked my hair up under my hat and went in to ask him why? He said, you look like a fine, upstanding young man I think you'll do. So I took off my hat and said imagine that, me working for you!"

John the Baptist was a long-haired, freaky person, who in the eyes of most people, need not apply. He was not someone you would invite over for dinner or to your Christmas party. He was abrasive at his best. He was aggressive with his message of preparing for God to come. He was a wild looking man by all accounts of him, who lived what you might call an alternative lifestyle, in the desert, feasting on locusts and honey. He would not likely be served in the local restaurant and would be more likely to spend his time there yelling wildly and pressuring other into listening to his message. Not exactly an upstanding member of the community in eyes of most people. An unlikely messenger don't you think? Shouldn't the message of the coming Messiah been better coming from one of the priests; or some other leader in the community? Aren't they the ones who know better? They have been trained and taught how to recognize these things. John is a freak, a loser, a weirdo.

But that didn't stop hoards of people flocking to him in fear of his message. The people did not want to be caught unprepared when God came. It was a well known fact that the Jewish world was awaiting the arrival of the King who would free them from oppression. It is not in your best interest to be caught unaware. John used the words of Isaiah to convince people that they should take notice and the words of Isaiah were not to be taken lightly.

The message of John the Baptist in the season of advent may seem obvious. We are to prepare for the Christ child to arrive. But it is deeper than that. Another important fact of John the Baptist is that he is so unlikely. It is in him, and through him, that we are to prepare to see Christ. The message of John the Baptist for us today is that it is in the unlikely places, among the unlikely people that we will find Jesus the Christ child and that we will see God.

I want to share with you a very personal story of seeing God in an unlikely source. One day while I was working at the AIDS Committee of Windsor one of our regulars came in, her name is Suzy and I had encountered her numerous times before. She was a 25 yr. Old prostitute addicted to crack and heroin. She was always high and this day was no exception. Her usual worker was tied up in a meeting and had no time to spend with her so she asked me to see Suzy. I agreed somewhat reluctantly since it was not my job to do direct case work. Never the less, after some begging, I said yes.

Suzy had found a green garbage bag of baby clothes and wanted us to take them because, she said, she knew we would give them to someone who needed them. In her excitement of giving something to us she had dumped the clothes on the floor in the main hallway of the building we were located in and so she and I sat on the floor in the main hallway of the building folding the clothes and packing them up.

Of course, this day as always Suzy was high, and making conversation with her was difficult, so I simply let her talk. She talked about her upcoming court date and whether or not she would go to jail for prostitution. She talked about the clothing and who it would go to; she talked about her own children, by the age of 25 she had had 3 children, all taken from her immediately following their births. Did I know where they were? Did I know if they had good homes? Did I know if she would ever see them again?

It was at this part of the conversation that I began to pray to myself. Dear God, be with Suzy, she is so hurt, her heart is broken, her spirit is broken, she needs to know you are near. It was here, on the floor in the hallway of a social service agency that I realized that this was my prayer. This prayer may have been more about me than her, even though I did mean the prayer for her. I was seeing God, through Suzy, to bring me to this point where I would ask God to come to me. It was here that I knew Suzy would either die or get well. And it was here that I would make the decision within my heart that I could not turn from God again. Last I heard Suzy was getting well. She was on a Methadone program and was working with her worker to remain drug free. Both of our lives were changed. When I was leaving the agency to go into ministry, Suzy said "I will remember you; you were always nice to me".

It is in the unlikely places that if we open ourselves up to the experience of seeing God that we will not turn from God again. Perhaps it will be this Christmas, or in this Advent that you will have the experience of seeing God in the unlikely places. That your life will be changed as you witness the birth of the Christ child anew. It may come to you as you volunteer to deliver Christmas boxes or read to someone who is blind, or when you are the recipient of a friendly gesture, or a kind work. We have numerous times when we are given the opportunity to see God; it is up to us to be prepared to recognise God when our chance comes.

One question we may ask ourselves this week as we reflect on the message of John the Baptist is this: What person, experience or event has been a "John the Baptist" for you this season?

Your person, experience or event may come in the hustle and bustle of the Christmas chaos or it may come in the quiet moments of the night; it may come on the street, or it may come here in this sanctuary. It may come in the letter you write to an MP or to Amnesty International. It may come to you in the sympathy card you write to a friend. The only thing you can know for sure is that it will come; will you be ready to receive it?

Amen