

Advent IV

Philippians 4: 4-7 & John 1: 19-28

Today is the last Sunday of Advent. We are getting closer and closer to the feast of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. And, these last days, we talk a lot about John the Baptist. There is a reason for that. John the Baptist, as Jesus Himself testified in the gospel, was a great man: “**11** Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone **greater** than John the Baptist” (Matthew 11: 11). Why should John’s message be given serious consideration as the testimony of a well-qualified preacher?

Well, John dedicated his life to preparing the way for the Messiah. In that respect, he came out to do the groundwork for fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies. He was the one about whom Isaiah prophesied by talking of a voice in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord (Isaiah 40: 3). He lived as a just and holy man. That caused him some jail time and even death.

When John spoke of one who would come after Him, he spoke about the only begotten Son of the Father who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14,15).

One thing about John the Baptist that struck me is that with all the power and fame that he had, he didn’t use his position to glorify himself. He pointed people to Jesus. And that’s the lesson we learn from this man. Most of the time, people think that pointing people to Jesus or doing the work of evangelism is the priest’s responsibility alone. That’s wrong! Every baptized person is required to do outreach, to make disciples for Christ. And that’s our common project this liturgical year 2024-25. We need to be mindful of how grow the church, to bring people to Jesus.

But how do we do that?

1. The first thing to do is to be clear of who we are NOT – John the Baptist was clear that he was not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet. We too, need to acknowledge that we are not the Christ and that we are not going to preach our own message or make people believe what we think, what we want, or our own view and opinion... We are not Christ.
2. John the Baptist was of a priestly family, and he could have been a part of their crowd—living comfortably in one of the cities, dressing in conventional robes, and functioning as a part of the “religious establishment”. But, instead, he was living out in the wilderness in a very unconventional way. His message wasn’t friendly toward the establishment. He

seemed a bit odd! To effectively point others to Jesus, we might not do exactly what John the Baptist did, by leaving our house and go into a desert and eat locusts. But we can do what he did by setting ourselves apart from the world, stop following them, stop living like them. It always amazes me to see how the Church—at least a good part of it—is following the world, instead of the world coming to the church to learn how to live a godly life. It always amazes me to see how church people—Christians, followers of Christ—go take the things of the world and bring them to Church...John the Baptist is given to us as an example of a radical choice for a Christ-like life.

3. We are not to take the place of God. Our job is to preach, and we should preach by example. Let God do the rest. We sow the seed, and God takes care of the growing part.

To effectively point others to Jesus, we need to be clear on who we are --- John the Baptist saw himself as a lowly servant of Jesus. And Jesus as such a worthy Master that John wasn't even worthy to untie His sandals' strap. To point people to Christ, we need to join John in seeing ourselves less and exalting Christ more. People don't need to be impressed with us, but with Jesus!

Whatever your gifts and calling, you can do as John the Baptist did and point people to Jesus. Deflect attention from yourself and to exalt Christ as the One worthy of all praise and glory.

Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at your first coming did send John the Baptist, your messenger, to prepare your way before you; Grant that we your servants here at St Alban's Anglican Catholic Church, way likewise so prepare and make ready your way, by turning the people of our generation to you, that at your second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people before you. We ask this through you, O Lord Jesus, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever. Amen!