



The Second Sunday of Advent (A)
December 8, 2019
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† May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemers. Amen.

Most of us have heard that “perception is 9/10 of reality”. That phrase popped into my head last week when reading a commentary on today’s Gospel. The commentary challenged me to think about my perception of John in Scripture and elsewhere, and about perceptions in general.

Iconography, icons, paintings and mosaics, typically show John as a tall, gaunt and somewhat elderly man or at least a ‘desert dude’ with very weathered darkened skin, long scraggly hair, seemingly scratchy camel hair clothing and so on.

Those outward appearances could easily lead one to think that John was a bit on the scary or oddly eccentric side, and then, there’s the part about what he ate. Yuck! But, what about John on the inside? Those might have been outward appearances but John is believed to have been a bridge between the old and the new, a Hebrew prophetic figure and a link between the prophecies of old and a herald of the messiah to come. So, who was John and can we really know him?

Some scholars believe John was part of the Essene Community, a community in the hot desert of Israel. Near the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea, the community seemed to have lived by a rule of life not unlike a monastic community. (<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/biblical-archaeology-sites/who-were-the-essenese/>) Today, we hear John and a voice of urgency to be sure.

The commentary I read said, “Maybe John’s message of urgency, threat, fulfillment, and hope was widely popular because he actually believed it himself. Maybe John wasn’t some scary, stern, wild-eyed, bug-eating, über-assured screamer down by the river as much as he was a preacher whose messages were true to his own adventure toward ongoing repentance—manifesting his own urgency, fear, confidence, and hope, as those experiences shaped his life.” (Matt Skinner, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5399>) Surely John was a composite of the experiences of his life which shaped him into who he was. Beyond being the cousin of Jesus, John’s experiences shaped him into the one baptizing in the River Jordan and the one who also baptized Jesus there as well.

Perhaps, our perceptions could use a bit of reshaping. What if John was a quiet, humble and contemplative man whose life was potentially different from one “crying” out in the wilderness? Perhaps, John went about his mission to help others and us to realize that we as human beings are in need of forgiveness which can lead to reconciliation?

A key to who John was in history is that he pointed to the one whose sandals he was not worthy to untie. Next Sunday, we will hear what is called the *Magnificat*. In that Gospel text, Mary proclaims, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior”.

Mary pointed beyond herself to Jesus, the Son of God. That reality certainly shaped and impacted her life in profound ways. Mary and John seemed to know who they were before God, as they lived into the reality of their lives.

The first two weeks of Advent present us with opportunities to face the reality of who we are while facing the reality that at some point in time, our lives will come to an end. The world as we know it, will come to an end.

The first two weeks of Advent challenge us to be ready. As Scripture tells us, we know not the day or the hour when the world as we have known it will come to an end. Depending on how we have lived our lives may result in how prepared we are to meet God in eternity, a meeting which we can only begin to imagine.

The wise person will live life as if the 'end time' could be tomorrow. The wise person will live life recognizing that our baptisms committed us to a particular way of life in Jesus. We were sealed as Christ's own forever. So, what does that mean to us? What does it mean to have been sealed as Christ's own and to live into the reality of the Beloved Community, a community which calls us to let our light shine as followers of Jesus?

On this Second Sunday of Advent, we are faced not only with preparing for the birth of Jesus amidst festivities of the secular world. We are faced with a reality of self, of identity, of commitment and of actions needing to speak louder than words.

Today, we are face-to-face with the reality of who we are before God, an encounter with the Divine at this moment in our personal story. Here in this beautiful historic place while the world around us is a swirl of activities as well as the effects of climate change, political upheaval, online shopping, Christmas parties, and all sorts of other things, we are called to pause, to reflect and to 'take a breath'. At this moment in time, we do pause, a pause which is hopefully and prayerfully refreshing and life-giving.

Advent is an opportunity for reflection and prayer. It is a time for self-realization as to what it means to follow Jesus. For me and I hope for you, this is a time to look deep inside to see what needs to be owned, healed and transformed. It is a time to ensure that our actions in life more clearly reflect the light of Jesus which shines within us.

If "perception is 9/10 of reality", then how do we want to be perceived by others? When we look into the 'mirror of life', who do we want to see? What changes do we need to make to help ensure that perceptions of us are who we really are as the beloved of God in Jesus?

As Church, the people of God, we can act from a deep inner awareness and commitment to radically work for peace and justice, "*so that* all might know God's forgiving and providential care". We can act to end violence of any kind, to end discrimination, mean-spiritedness and hate and walk in the way of Jesus. (O. Wesley Allen at www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4308)

Let us walk in the light of Christ and live his 'Way of Love'. Let us allow the inner light within us to shine so brightly that it can and will bring life to the world around us. Amen.