

ADVENT 4  
"Who Art Thou?"

TEXT: ST. JOHN 1:19

"They said unto him, who art thou? That they may give answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord."

On this last Sunday of Advent I bring you greetings in the name of our most precious savior Jesus Christ who asks each of us "Who art thou?."

Call it a question of identity. John the Baptist had developed quite a following. Prophets were commonplace in that day and often a prophet would arise and if the public heard what they liked, they followed him. But John was different. While other prophets wanted a gather many around them to hear their message and perhaps even help support their cause, this man spoke not of himself but another. He clearly told those who listened that he was not the one but there was one coming soon that would redeem the world. Many wondered who this man was and why he was baptizing. They even wondered if he was one of the great prophets come back to life.

John's disciples were building and when Jesus began His ministry, John encouraged them to follow Jesus and to go to Him, listen to His words and dedicate themselves to the one who came after Him. John wanted everyone to understand that his voice was there to proclaim the coming of the Christ, to announce the redeemer of mankind, to point the way, to glorify God.

John knew what was coming-the Lord, the messiah, the savior of man, the Christ. He shouted it every chance he could, he told the many who gathered around him, he pronounced it to the masses; he proclaimed it to Herod himself. Some thought he was a madman; he ate honey and dressed in poor clothing. He stood in the water for hours baptizing all that would come see him. He was just a little different.

Yet, clear in his mind was his task and what he was to do. Proclaim the Christ! Stand and let everyone know the Lord was coming. He didn't care about riches, about what he ate, about where he slept-he needed to let everyone know, the Christ was at hand.

Imagine that? Forsaking everything of the world for the sake of Christ. Many have done it since. Some have dedicated themselves totally following John's example and totally immersed themselves in God's work. But John's message of the coming of the Lord is one for all of us and his example is one to look at carefully, because we are being asked the same question that was put to John. Who art thou?

How often are we asked and we find ourselves in that uncomfortable position of having to proclaim our faith in the Christ? I try to imagine the plight of the first Christians who were persecuted by Rome. They created little symbols like the simple drawing of a fish to identify themselves to each other. They would make the sign of the cross as they passed in the streets to show each other they believed. Their faith could cost them their lives and they were subtle in their proclamations. Not John! He shouted it from the hill tops and it cost him his life. Imagine for a second being a Jew in 1942? Because of your belief, of your lineage, you knew they would come for you eventually. We know their fate but they didn't realize what was happening until it was too late. They lived for their God and they died for their faith.

I wonder if a time will ever come when someone will say to you or me, are you a Christian? And if you answer yes, your life would be forfeit? Some of our fellow Christians who are fundamentalists believe that will happen. But the reality is that it is not the brash challenge of our faith that is troubling, it is the slow and methodical dismantling of Christ by the world and the silence of the majority of over two billion Christians that is much more disturbing.

**I AM A CHRISTIAN! I BELIEVE IN THE ONE TRUE LORD AND THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD!  
I BELIEVE JESUS CHRIST IS THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD! I BELIEVE THAT NO ONE  
COMES TO THE FATHER EXCEPT THROUGH CHRIST!**

Easy to say here in church. What about out there?

How often do we find ourselves in the position to share our faith, bring someone to church, welcome a new face, share the love of Christ or even reach out to someone in need? I suspect more frequently than we care to admit. Like John, each of us is Christ's messenger. We know the truth, we have the faith, we have the desire but we need to show the courage of our convictions like John did. In the face of all that is around us to cry out "Make straight the way of the Lord!"

St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians says it clearly in the Epistle this morning. "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say Rejoice. Let your moderation be known to all men. The Lord is at hand."

Man is abandoning God and we as His faithful followers are doing little to stop it. We turn our head from those in need, we accept greetings of Happy Holidays to be politically correct in a world where the celebration of Christ's birth is driven more by retail sales than sharing His love. We quietly sit in our pews often not knowing the face of the person next to us or offering a warm greeting to a stranger. Is this what Christ asks of us? Is this how we show our thanksgiving to our Lord who in His birth has given us, yes given us by His grace, eternal life?

I wonder sometimes how well we would all fare if we had to earn our salvation. I wonder if we each had to give an account of our works how we would all do. How many times did we not help those in need, how many times did we turn away, how many times did we fail to share Christ's love with a stranger, how many times did we not take a moment to thank Him for all He has given us.

Do we not hear when God speaks? "He who denies me before men, so will I deny Him before the Father."

Let us consider ourselves fortunate that our salvation is given and cannot be earned. Through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we have been given the gift of life eternal. Our lives and those who we love will pass away here on earth and we will live forever with Him. This is not some fairy tale. This is reality-the gift of salvation, paid by our Lord on the cross, given us freely through the grace of God and accepted by each of us through faith.

If our faith is real, than we should have to think about sharing Christ's love-we should just DO IT! We should not hesitate to stand up for Christ in our lives, in our words, in our actions, in our deeds in our love for one another. It is time to light a fire under the world for Christ, to thaw out the frozen chosen, to say to the world I AM A FOLLOWER OF THE ONE TRUE GOD and OF THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD.

To be bold in saying that Christ is the way and the truth and the life and that no one comes to the Father except through Him. It may not be politically correct but it is the truth that God wants each of us to proclaim.

So this Christmas, this day of celebration for the gift that God has given us, this wonderful time of inviting our Lord into our lives again, may each of us be a shining example of His love for us. Let us touch each other's lives, and in that simple expression of God's love, may the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep you hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN