

Matthew 3:1-11

December 9, 2007

You can sing a happy song if you're glad. You can sing a protest song if you're mad. But if you want to sing the blues. Then Boy you better learn how to lose.

I love the blues but I probably can't really sing it the way it should be sung until I have suffered a little more in my life. My life is just a little too good to be able to really sing the blues. The blues are about passion, emotion and suffering. For some reason singing about suffering, singing the blues makes you feel good. It makes me feel good. But you can't sing it, unless you've lived it. That's why the song says: But if you want to sing the blues. Then boy or girl you better learn how to lose.

This is one of the reasons why we try to sing Advent songs during Advent and not Christmas carols. If we just sing joy, joy, joy, love, love, love, merry, merry Christmas all during advent and Christmas we run the danger of missing Advent and as a result missing the whole point as to why God sent a savior to the world.

For example, our reading from Isaiah today seems strange to me. According to scholars this reading is from 1st Isaiah. Judah and Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians 587 b.c. and the Babylonians took them captive back to Babylon. 1st Isaiah is believed to be written before the captivity. 3rd Isaiah written after the captivity and 2nd Isaiah during the captivity. So, if this is 1st Isaiah that means, it was written before the Babylonian captivity.

This reading sounds strange for me because he is talking about what it's going to be like when the messiah comes and rights all the wrongs they have suffered. The only problem is that the suffering hasn't started yet. Jerusalem hasn't fallen yet. He is talking about the future. Prophets speak the word of God sometimes concerning the past, sometimes concerning the present and sometimes concerning the future. But how would the people of his time receive this message? Isaiah is saying, Things are going to be better when the Messiah comes and restores the kingdom. But the kingdom hasn't fallen yet. They haven't suffered yet, How can they sing the blues? How can they rejoice in the victory?

It would be like saying, Don't worry God will restore to our United States homeland. Restore us from what?

God sends John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus. He sends him to get people ready for Jesus. John is not the type of person you would want to invite over to a dinner party. I'm not talking about his sense of fashion. Or his diet. Though there is that.

John is someone who lives in the wilderness away from people because he has to. John is the type of person who shakes you when your sleeping. He is the type of person who reminds you that just because your Daddy was a Christian or just because your Momma was a Christian, doesn't make you a Christian. John is the type of person who reminds you how someone acts when they are trying to live out a Christian life and how someone doesn't act. He's the type of person that tells you that if you are going to repent, change your ways, you have to change your ways.

John is trying to show people that they need Jesus and scaring them is not beyond him. Maybe we can call that the “John effect”.

The “John effect” is when someone dies, especially when someone young dies, and you realize, life is short, and we don’t know how, short it might be. The “John effect” helps us see, the time to get our priorities straight in life might be, RIGHT NOW.

The temptation in Advent is to skip Advent and go right to Christmas. Reality can be tough to face. Many times we would like to just deny the realities of life, the problems in life and escape. What better place to escape to than the fantasy of Christmas.

Just think for a minute. Let’s play word association. When I say Christmas what do you think of? Snow? Christmas celebration can be a wonderful escape with all the food, fellowship, the giving and receiving of presents.

When a husband and wife want to have a baby they can’t just get one real quick. It takes 9 months or more. And women tell me it isn’t always the most comfortable time in their life. They say it’s worth it, kind of. But not the most comfortable. If you want to adopt it usually takes even longer with maybe more sacrifices.

So, it takes 9 months to make a baby, you’ve got to suffer to sing the blues and God wouldn’t have sent a savior to save the world including you and me, if we didn’t need to be saved, if the world didn’t need to be saved.

Last week, I helped Lundberg funeral home with the memorial service they had for the people they had served over the past year, for people who have lost a loved one this past year.

As you would expect those people are not looking forward to Christmas. It’s probably not going to be a joy, joy, joy, love, love, love, merry, merry Christmas this year. But in a way it might put them in a position to experience the real meaning of Christmas.

I think sometimes our Christmas celebrating makes us forget about Jesus, you know put Christ back in Christmas. In all the celebration we sometimes forget not only who came at Christmas but why he came, and what he came to do. He came to die. He came to save the world. But he came to die in order to save the world.

John tells us today, that unlike some other guy, some cubby, fuzzy, jolly guy, Jesus didn’t come because we’ve been good. Jesus came because we needed his help, we need his help. He does for us what we can’t possibly do for ourselves.

So there might be some other ways to get ready to party at Christmas than making cookies, putting up lights, giving and receiving presents and singing carols. These things are not bad in themselves don’t get me wrong. They’re wonderful fun things to do.

But what does John have to say to us to get us ready? What are some of the things in our life we need to wake up about? What might put us in a better position to receive Jesus this Christmas? God bless your preparation for Jesus this week.