

**Children's Message from 12/3/17 based on Isaiah 11:6-9, David Jahnke**

1. We just read about a time when the wolf and the lamb lying together; the lion and the calf...
2. Jesus as the lion and the lamb
3. Aslan from Narnia is Jesus
4. powerful; bold roaring; calling for us to pay attention and be afraid of evil
5. Jesus is the lamb as well...; he is with the weak because he became weak...
6. We must be both as well...; being bold in calling people to goodness in love and being gentle in showing them to those who are hurting..

**A Bold and Humble Witness to Jesus**

**Based on Matthew 3:7-12 and Mark 1:1-8, David Jahnke, 12/3/17**

Continuing with the same theme from the children's message. Mark lays out right at the beginning of his gospel what he is writing about and who Jesus is!! That is what I as a preacher must do and what we as a church should do. We should all be modern-day John the Baptists-- voices of truth and hope in the wilderness of a spiritually ambivalent and agnostic society, pointing ahead to the one about whom all people must make a decision, day in and day out.

The other night it hit me in a very powerful way how clear it is that Jesus is the Messiah and our hope for the world. 1. I thought of the Love Jesus showed to all. Can anything else save the world? 2. I thought of our relationships, personal and collective, wonderful and yet broken; and how they are reconciled time and again by way of the repentance and forgiveness that Jesus said were central to peace Jesus. 3. I thought of the poor in mind, body or spirit-- those broken by a broken world-- how Jesus reached out and included and taught them. And wondered how else could even know love and wisdom? 4. The sick and hungry...what else could we possibly be called to other than provide means for healing and sustenance which Jesus did time and again?

And all of this culminates in the compassion of God on the cross leading to the revelation of eternal life in the resurrection. Is there any other hope for us finite and perishable creatures? Jesus embodies all of this and so much more that touches our deepest parts. And I cannot imagine people not connecting to all of this if they just knew and allowed themselves time for reflection and study...

All of this hit me in like a 30 second flash. And I hope you have this kind of clarity about Jesus, generally speaking. If you are struggling spiritually, be gracious to yourself and remember that even John the Baptist wondered at one point whether Jesus was the Messiah or not and he had his disciple go ask Jesus. Jesus pointed to many of the things I already mentioned in his reply.

Now we try to escape the truth time and again, and we succeed for a few minutes as we give into temptation. Others escape for a lifetime through self-centered living. But noone escapes the light of God shining the truth upon their hearts and minds. They can deceive themselves for a time but God keeps pursuing them and will reveal Himself eventually. And at that point, you either fully give into the darkness or you accept the light; and that is when the miracle of Christmas gradually unfolds.

I read this the other night from Alfred Delp, a German Catholic priest who was martyred during World War II.

Here is the message of Advent: faced with Him who is the Last, the world will begin to shake. Only when we do not cling to the false securities will our eyes be able to see this Last One and get to the bottom of things. Only then will we be able to guard our life from the...terrors which the Lord God has let us sink [in order] to teach us, so that we may awaken from sleep, as Paul says, and see that it is time to repent, to change things. It is time to say, "All right, it was night; but let that be over now and let us be ready for the day."

Remember that it was in the darkness of a humble stable that the light of all life shined; in the coldness of rejection persecution that God's warmth entered the world. So when we are brought low by a failure, by guilt, by the sins of others or by general sadness, God has allowed us to get to that point in order to say, "I am here" and call us to surrender.

Now generally speaking (not absolutely), before men get to this place, we shrug our shoulders with a kind of ho-hum "What are you gonna do?" apathetic approach to life. And before women get to this place, you are usually overly empathic and burdened.

But John and Jesus will not let us keep going on with either extreme, friends. There is too much at stake for us personally and for the world around us. John refused to accept the status quo as determined by men which is evident in his rebuke of the righteous leaders of his own day. "Bear the fruits of repentance because God's winnowing fork is in his hand, ready to separate the wheat from the chaff..." It was primarily women who had to bear the burden of unjust systems. The men controlled resources and decision-making; they ate first and had as much as they wanted and the women shared the rest with children.

While Jesus humbled the powerful like John, he also healed and exalted oppressed women time and again. A Samaritan woman, a Syro-Phoenician woman, foreigners, a bleeding woman, Mary Magdalene who was demon-possessed, harlots, Mary and Martha; all shown love and mercy; all honored and called to spread the Word or join the inner circle of his movement which they did.

I saw clergywomen and men warning our own leaders on Capitol Hill this week, reading verse after verse about God's particular care for the poor. I am not an economist and do not care to argue from the pulpit about the righteousness or unrighteousness of the policy choices made by our lawmakers this last week.

But I was deeply moved by Christian leaders reminding our lawmakers of the Word of the Lord and that they would be judged by it. That judgment is suddenly happening everywhere around us as the oppression and mistreatment of so many women by powerful men is finally coming to light in a wonderful radical wave of revelation and justice. Again, we can run but we cannot hide from an all-knowing God.

I was blessed to join Rabbi Joel's 18th anniversary celebration last Friday. For those of you who do not know, we hosted a Jewish congregation here for eleven years. The Torah passage was about Jacob's wrestling with God. I spoke of Jacob stealing his brother Esau's blessing and then fleeing. He was about to meet him again. And his brother had since grown strong and Jacob was afraid that his brother was going to kill him. So he had sent his family ahead with gifts. And then he had a restless night of struggling with God. He ended up with a limp and a blessing.

There are people in our nation who, like Esau, have been wronged; those whose divine blessings have been stolen over the centuries. And they are rising in power and causing much fear. And we can choose to let other family members go ahead and encounter the estranged and disenfranchised but we cannot escape the struggle. Because if we do not enter the struggle out there, the struggle in here simply intensifies. And we end up wrestling with God, day and night. But even then, we will be blessed when we realize the struggle is with a God who will not let us go and loves us so much.

When we say uncle and surrender, the interior struggle will continue but God will also send us out to enter into the struggles of others. We enter into our Christian calling of exalting the lowly and humbling the exalted. People will take notice. They will see that we care about more than ourselves. Some might mock us or get angry at Jesus' shaking false foundations. But most will find their spirits stirred and may begin to realize that the wrestling inside them is with God.

So please turn to the gospels this Advent and learn more about Jesus' Way. Wrestle with God's Word and Spirit and when you are brought low in the middle of the night. Say uncle at those times and turn to prayer. Give into God's love and mercy and join whatever blessed struggle he is calling you to out there. To the One who can do far more abundantly in and through us than all we can ask or imagine; to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, now and forevermore.