

Advent sermon on John the Baptist by the Junior Youth – Dec. 4, 2016

The 5 Voices:

Old Testament (OT) - Bea

The Believer (B) – Alak

The Questioner (Q) – Elliot

The Explainer (E) – Ani

New Testament (NT) – Alex

OT – Something is happening.

B – Someone is coming

Q – Have you heard?

E – Now is the time to hear.

NT – The one who is coming is almost here.

OT - “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.”

E – Jesse, the father of David. King David, the king of the Jewish kingdom that has been destroyed.

B – The roots remain. A new thing is growing from the roots. Something new is coming from the memory of the ancient kingdom.

OT - “The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge”

E – This shoot is a PERSON. This new thing is a king. A king unlike other kings. A king with God's spirit, with wisdom, understanding, counsel and might, with knowledge...

OT - “and the fear of the Lord.
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.”

Q – With the fear of the Lord. What does that mean? It says his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. Who has delight in fear?

E – Kingdoms are built on fear. The fear of organised violence. Armies, inquisitions, tax collectors, courts and prisons, executions, exile.

B – Those things are NOT the fear of the Lord. That is an old fear. It is not the new thing. The fear of the Lord is about wisdom and the pursuit of justice, and repenting, turning away from evil.

NT - “In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke

when he said,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

Q – Is John the Baptist the new thing? Isaiah says that John is preparing the way of the Lord. Is John also the shoot from the stump of Jesse? The one with the spirit of the Lord?

E – John is connected to this ancient prophecy. He is acting out the references to the prophets of old.

NT - “Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.”

OT - “Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.”

Q – John is acting like a prophet. But is John the subject of Isaiah's prophecy? Of whom is the prophet speaking?

B – Isaiah’s prophecy describes the nature of the one who is to come.

OT - “He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;”

E – John judges those who come to see him.

NT - “But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

B – That is not judgement, it is condemnation. He commands repentance and offers baptism.

Q – Is he the judge that Isaiah spoke of? Does he speak with understanding, counsel, and knowledge? Or does he speak with anger, condemnation and sarcastic humour?

NT - “Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.”

Q – What does it mean when Isaiah says 'he shall not judge by what his eyes see' or 'what his ears hear'? Who judges without looking at the evidence and without hearing testimony?

B – The one to come will not judge by appearance but by actions, thoughts, purity of spirit. John says it is not good enough to be descendants of Abraham.

Q – But the one Isaiah speaks about is a descendant of Jesse and David. Isn’t that a special ancestry?

E – The Pharisees and Sadducees call themselves descendants of Abraham, but they mistreat the poor and oppress the weak. They believe that they are safe from the consequences because of their ancestor. But the one who Isaiah speaks of will be different. He will judge with righteousness. He is coming from the root – the source, the truth, the authority of God. He is not impressed by riches and power.

B – And he will punish the wicked.

OT - “he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth”

Q – The rod of his mouth? With his words?

E – A rod might mean a staff or tool used to guide the sheep or exert force. His words are forceful and persuasive.

Q- But why will he strike the earth? What does that mean? Our human systems? Ecological systems?

NT - “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

E – The winnowing fork is used to thresh the grain, striking the earth over and over to separate the good wheat from the worthless chaff.

Q – What is chaff?

B – The husk of the wheat, the outer layer you can’t eat. Once it is separated from the good grain, you burn the chaff. The metaphor means the unfruitful parts. The sins in our ordinary human lives. The refusal to repent. The desire for evil.

NT - “Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

E – That sounds violent, the threat of hell-fire. If you are not good, you will be burned! John is warning the people that they need to repent. To turn away from their evil. He is saying that there is another way to be.

OT - “he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth”

B – The words of the prophet will separate the good from the bad. It is a warning and a chance for repentance. These words will save us, or they can destroy us.

OT - “and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked”

NT - "the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

B – Judgement is near. But there is also hope.

NT - "Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

OT - "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots."

E – Even when the tree is torn down – like the ancient kingdom – the roots remain. We hear the warning. We also hear the promise of hope!

OT - "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain;

for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.""

NT - "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

B – Something is happening

OT - "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots."

B – Someone is coming

NT - "one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals."

E – Isaiah expects him. John expects him.

Q – Do we expect him?

B – Do we expect him?

E – Do we expect him?

Q – Have you heard?

E- Now is the time to hear.

B – The one who is coming is almost here.

Everyone – AMEN