

Sermon for the Third Sunday of Advent

'To proclaim the year of our Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God.'

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Pride is the fact behind which hides every evil thing. It is because of pride that we resent our parents. It is because of pride that resent our spouse. It is because of pride that small children dishonor their father and mother. It is because of pride that we curse our God.

For pride is to think more of ourselves than what we are. It is the opposite of faith.

Faith is to know our place; a fallen and sinful, a weak and feeble, a miserable and constantly needy lost soul. A soul who knows there is no salvation within himself. A soul robbed of heaven. A soul enslaved to that which is wrong. A soul that cries out.

Cries out to whom? It does not matter. Faith first cries out to anyone that will hear. Faith cries out to the one that might save. An infant in fact does have faith, for at birth, it cries for help.

It is for this reason that we call pride, 'the queen of all sins.' For it stifles every cry for salvation, even the salvation we all know we need. If we cry not for salvation, who shall hear our call for deliverance? If we never ask for aid, who then will help us? We are as a people robbed of our birthright, as sons of the Father. Yet the name that was rightfully ours has been defiled.

Saint John the Baptist speaks strangely, in a way that seems false. When he is asked if he is the Prophet spoken of by Moses, the Elijah spoken of by Malachi, or the Christ, he denies these things.

For Adam and Eve were promised a Christ, a Messiah, from whom would come

redemption, but John said that he was not this man.

For Malachi promised the coming of Elijah, *to turn the hearts of small children*. But John said he was not this man.

For Moses promised that there would be a prophet greater than him, that would *speak to God face to face, as a friend*. But John said that he was not this man.

Who, then, is John?

He is no-one, and he is everyone. He is a sinner, like you and me. He is a man of God, like you and me. He was born of the water of his mother's womb. Now he offers birth in the water of baptism.

He wears a pelt of camel's hair. He has no wealth. He resides in the wilderness. He knows no luxury. He offers no beneficence of wealth. He offers only water. Water of repentance; water of repentance that washes away the stain of the flesh, but cannot wash away the stain of sin.

What is the use of such washing, of such a baptism, that cannot do anything more than wash the skin of broken people? John professes that there is no use, for it is written, *'I baptize with water.'*

Indeed, he only baptizes with water. John is a man of humiliation. He can do nothing. He cannot save us, nor does he claim that he can. He baptizes, not that his baptism has any power, but that we might look for the baptism that does.

One of the crowd that follows him asks, *'why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?'* John answered them, *"I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie."*

John does not answer the question. He does not explain why he is baptizing. He only says that he is baptizing to mark the way for Him who will give the true baptism. Him who *will baptize not with water, but with the Holy Spirit*.

Who, then, is this, who will bring the true baptism? John does not dare to say, but only mentions that He is among us now. This man, *the strap of whose sandals he is not worthy to untie*.

This is most proper, for the first act of trust, is to not trust in one's self.

A man is among us. One who does not present himself in any regalia, in any glory or splendor known to men, of gems and gold and insignia. He walked among the crowds, wearing but a tunic, a tunic that would heal the woman with the flow of blood. He walked among the rich, speaking words, words that would command the young ruler to abandon his wealth. He suffered against the rulers, a suffering which would encompass the misery of man. He died a death, even a death that we deserved.

Who is this man? He is a poor man. He is a hated man. He is a sorrowful man. He is the Son of Man. The man by whom all things are made new. He is the Christ, Prophet. He is Him whom Elijah, that is, John, is unworthy to serve. John is but *a voice crying in the wilderness*. The one spoken of is the Word. He is the One whom we are all unworthy to serve.

But this is no problem. *For he came not to be served but to serve.*

Pride is the fact behind which every evil thing hides. But humiliation is the truth behind which all good is hidden.

And in humility, Christ knows Himself, for in faith toward His Father, He thinks not more of Himself than He should. He knows His own place. He knows Himself to be only what He is: *to be the Lord's anointed, to be the comfort of all who mourn, to be the binding of the captives, to be the vengeance of the Lord.*

What, then, shall the Christ avenge Himself against? It is obvious, for it is written in the prophet. He shall seek recompense against him who has been malicious to mankind. He has spoken; and there is no other truth:

*'I, the Lord, love justice;
I hate robbery and I despise the wrong.'*

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28.