

Advent 3

December 13, 2020

Why Were We Born?

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Most of us have been asked at one time or another where we were born. Probably we've also been asked where we were raised or how we grew up. I know that is one of my favorite questions to ask first timers when they worship with us. It's a safe bet, however, that not many of us have ever been asked *why* we were born or *why* we are still alive. That line of questioning may be the kind of thing armchair philosophers muse about, but it is seldom the topic of water-fountain conversation, party talk or family dinner discussions.

The questions that revolve around the place or the circumstance of our birth may be interesting. How we grew up may be intriguing to family members or others who are close to us. But beyond their informational or even entertainment value, the answers to those questions are not nearly as important as the answers as to why we were born or even why we are still alive. The answers concerning the place or even the circumstances of our birth do not have the power to provide direction or meaning to our lives in the way that the why of our birth and our life does.

So why were we born? Why did the Creator of the entire cosmos see fit to include each of us in the total picture of this vast universe? If our birth was simply an accident, then God does not have the power that we ascribe to a

Divine Intelligence. If, on the other hand, each of us has a purpose, it behooves us to discover what that purpose is.

We are told that God is love. We also say that we are created in the image and likeness of God. It is then not a far jump to say that we were born to learn and to teach and to practice love. In other words, we were born to learn and to teach about God, as well as to live God's way. But how aware are we of this reality and how willing are we to say, "Yes" to this awesome assignment? In fact, it is the most important assignment we will ever receive and our "Yes" to the assignment is the most important "Yes" we will ever utter. The assignment is not the assignment from a boss or a teacher. It is not an assignment given to us by a president, a king, or a governor. It is an assignment given by the God of our life.

Consider John the Baptist and what we hear him say of himself in the gospel today. He was a man who knew his assignment and who had said, "Yes." He realized his purpose. He knew who he was and why he was here as surely as he knew who he was not.

We hear him admit to himself and his questioners that he is not the Messiah. Despite the fact that we at times give the impression that we think we are messiahs of sorts; the role does not fit us well because that is not what we have been born to be.

Then we hear John announce who he is, and it shows that he realizes the

purpose of his life. “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’” John says.

Perhaps we might respond that we are no John the Baptist. And that may be true, but it is just as true that our assignment and the purpose of our lives are similar to his.

We are all called to be voices crying out in the wilderness of our own time. We are all called to make straight the way of the Lord. The people with whom we rub elbows are not going to meet John the Baptist. They are meeting you and me. That gives each of us the power that John had as he preached at the Jordan River. That’s right, a power: the power of God within us. And the refusal to use it as God wants us to, is an insult to the Creator.

We are not bad people. We do not have bad intentions and certainly we do not wish to insult God. So why then do we not use this power? Why do we overlook the assignment that has been given to each of us?

One answer may lie in the way we have come to think of the division in Christianity into those we call lay people and those we call clergy. In the minds of many, clergy are seen as “God people.” They are assigned by the community to be the people who do the praying for those thought by some to be less capable or even less worthy of doing so. More often than not, if there is a clergy person in the room and a prayer is called for, it is the pastor who is called upon — as if lay people will not be heard by God as well. But when it

comes to having a pipeline to God, none of us has an advantage. It is given to all of us, regardless of our station in life, to make straight the way of the Lord. So, the question is, “How do we make the way straight?”

We can begin only by accepting the message of John the Baptist in our own lives. We become the voices in the wilderness only when we can show the way. People whose lives we touch need to see that faith not only matters to us, but that it can, when lived honestly, give meaning, purpose, and fulfillment to life.

It is true that we do this in a “wilderness.” Ours is a world of as many gods as those found in ancient Greece or Rome. Of course, we do not call them gods, but our idols are many. A consumer society in which bigger is better, more is sought after, power is envied, and celebrity is worshiped is a barren wilderness when it comes to focusing on our life with God. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that you and I cannot realistically withdraw from this society, and we have at some level bought into its values.

So, we are not only called to make straight the way of the Lord, but we are also called to do so in a world that is as surely a wilderness as was the district of the Jordan River.

Lest we see the world only in negative terms, however, we should remember that while the world has a wilderness dimension, it is also populated by people who want God in the center of their lives. Even those who do not

realize what it is they seek are, as someone has put it, “Wired for God.”

There is a spiritual thirst that is evident, a thirst that crosses generations and subcultures. It is for us to offer news of Christ, the water of life, to those who thirst in a wilderness world.

Anyone who has been married knows that the “yes” or the “I do” uttered in a wedding ceremony is not enough to sustain the marriage. It is a “yes” that must be repeated each day. Saying yes to our assignment to make straight the way of the Lord can be no less. It is a “yes” that must be repeated over and over. It is a “yes” that must be lived as surely as it is preached.

Not all preachers are found in pulpits. Not all Christians are accomplished speakers. But we can be models of faith, models to whom people can look and say, “I want to be like that.” In other words, those who would make the Lord’s way straight need to be advertisements for the Lord. This is not only the assignment we have been given, it is the power with which we have been invested.

So, there are yet a couple of final questions. Why would someone who watches us in an office, a shop or even a church want to believe what we say *we* believe? Why would someone who hears us at a party or at a dinner, a business meeting or wherever else people express their views, want to follow us on the road to the Lord? These are questions that we should not ignore.

It is for us to make the Lord attractive to those who hear us, those who watch us and those who are influenced by our lives.

It is for us to understand and accept that we are called to be voices in the wilderness and to lead lives that model faith as John did. It is for us to make straight the way of the Lord. The time we have been given to do that is now. That is the ultimate why of our lives.