

Message: A Navigator of the Way

“I’ve heard the voice when I needed to hear it, given each situation. I first heard the voice on my wedding day, as I walked up the stairs to my church’s sanctuary. I was nervous - scared, really. The voice clearly said, ‘This is right.’ And it’s been right for 43 years now. Each time I have heard the voice, it has been a time of change. And each time it has comforted me and let me know that all is well.”¹

God speaks to us when we’re in need. God speaks to reassure us, give guidance, alert us and talk straight. Last Sunday, we read the promise God gave to Jeremiah to send someone to make things right (33:14-16). That’s what it means to be in a covenant relationship. It’s like a marriage, a common illustration used by Jesus. God promises to keep one end of the relationship: no matter how hard things get, the Messiah will love, forgive and then save us. All we have to do is keep our end of the relationship and return God’s love.

Then we read Jesus’ words in Luke’s narrative. Jesus made a great and wonderful promise: he will come to earth again (21:27)! There won’t be any doubt about it. Jesus tells us not to become enamored with earthly things, because they’ll fail or fall at some point. He also warned us not to get caught up in looking for signs or paying attention to “doomsday deceivers” (v8). Jesus told us to be on guard for things that would distract us, dulling our expectations.

That’s what can happen in a relationship, particularly in our relationship with God. The honeymoon phase is over. The two have gotten used to each other. Work, life and children take up our time, so we give less and less to the relationship. Then, one day, we wake up to find out that we don’t know the person we’re in a covenant relationship with.

What happens next has a life-changing impact on us and on children, family, friends and community. We either wake up, change our lives and make things right or else we separate, a difficult, painful process that will lead to a another way of living. That happens in life

¹ <https://www.guideposts.org/inspiration/miracles/gods-grace/when-god-speaks>

between people, leading to heartache. When it happens in our relationship with God, it leads to death and a life half-lived.

There’s hope: we can change. Transformation isn’t easy, but it’s important if we want to have a real, full life. Christmas is intended to be a transforming event, not a fun interlude in business or life as usual. What we do in Advent in preparation for Christmas will be our means of getting ready for a new way of looking at life - a new way of living.

Our scripture readings for today tell us what God revealed to Malachi and to John the Baptist. The Messiah, the anointed one, is coming to deliver us from the trap that we’ve gotten ourselves into. There’s light in the darkness. It’s a spiritual light that will change the world as we know it. It will light our spirit on fire.

But there’s only one problem: we see the light but we don’t know how to follow it. We aren’t sure of the destination. Even if we were, we need someone to show us the way. The advice of friends and family may not cut it. For example, the first time I came to the LA area, I was given advice on how to find my way by friends who had lived there most of their lives. They said, “Just keep the mountains on one side and you can’t lose your way.” Sounds like good advice. Only one problem: by the time I got here, rented a car and got ready to go, it was dark! I couldn’t see the mountain. And, you guessed it, I got lost.

We need a navigator.

I’m not talking about using your smart phone. Esperanza will tell you that I have a love-hate view of GPS mapping apps. They’re helpful, but have no real knowledge of intent or purpose. Devices can’t provide the kind of navigation we need. Only someone who is in relationship with God, who is spiritually connected to the source of life, can help us on our spiritual journey. We can’t find our way on our own.

We read about Malachi and John the Baptist almost every year at this time. Why? They’re our navigators. They’re God’s messengers, pointing us to the destination so our path goes in the right direction. The two are connected. God revealed this to Malachi, *“Look, I am sending my messenger who will clear the path before me; The messenger of*

the covenant in whom you take delight is coming, says the LORD of [hosts]” (3:1). The messenger comes to the people. That’s why we need to gather with others for worship, prayer and study of God’s Word. We need help to find our way.

God made a promise to the people of Israel who had returned home after being in exile in Babylon for seventy years. Judgment happened. They’re trying to put their lives back together, but they’re still falling short. They’ve learned bad habits. Their leaders aren’t teaching them what they need to know to be right with God. Malachi’s words would have been difficult to hear. Yet they offered hope for the future. His words tell what was to come. No matter how dark and difficult things were, a messenger will come to show us the way to salvation, to the Messiah. Amen!

Malachi is the last prophet of the Old Testament. No other prophet appears to speak to the people for almost 400 years. John the Baptist is the next. John knows he’s a prophet. John hears God’s voice. He’s the one that Malachi wrote about (3:4), the cleanser and refiner. John tells the priests and people they need to be cleansed and purified, reaffirming Malachi’s message. John called people to be *“baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins”* (Luke 3:3).

John is THE navigator. The people were so hungry for God they thought John might be the deliverer. After all, his message – even though it was harsh – was very popular. People were hurting and in need. The government was unjust. Poverty and hunger were common. The rites and rituals of church just didn’t seem to work anymore. The result: thousands came to be baptized. John the Baptist was the Billy Graham, Rick Warren and Greg Laurie of his day.

But John knew his role: he was only a navigator. John said, *“I baptize you with water, but the one who is more powerful than me is coming. I’m not worthy to loosen the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”* (Luke 3:16). Jesus is the true Savior, the one who redeems us and saves us by his body and blood. John is pointing us to Jesus; that’s our true destination.

John’s message points to the prophetic words of Malachi. The prophet Malachi spoke of a messenger. He told us how we would know when we hear the true navigator. That person would be:

- One who will prepare the way of the Lord;
- One who reminds us of the covenant of God;
- One who refines and purifies us in faithfulness.

Who is the messenger in your life and how have you served as a navigator for others? John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus. As Jesus’ disciples, we’re the ones who are called to point people to the way today. That’s our role. We’re God’s messengers. We point the way when we tell people about Jesus, when we share our experience of God, when we pray for someone and particularly when we invite someone to come to church or a small group or gathering that offers a spiritual connection and invitation. I encourage you to invite someone to join us for one of these activities.

Let’s ask ourselves some questions on this 2nd Sunday in Advent: how do we prepare to be transformed by the coming of the Lord?

- Are we allowing the light of hope to awaken our spirits?
- Are we making room for the Lord to write the covenant on our hearts?
- Are we living in gratitude for what we receive in the Lord?²

If we prepare ourselves by renewing our covenant with God, then we will be truly transformed as Christ comes again into our lives. I pray you are renewed as you prepare yourself for Jesus.

² Material drawn from www.gbod.org

Let us pray ...

Lord, thank you for keeping your promise. You are the true light in the darkness that surrounds us. We are grateful that you sent us a messenger to help us navigate the spiritual journey of life. Lord, we need forgiveness and cleansing as our lives are rough and unfinished. Give us the courage to change. Cleanse us, purify us, give us your gentle love, your pure peace, and your shining hope. Let the offering of our lives be beautiful and unhindered. Let our hearts be steadfast and sure as we face the future, knowing that the future is yours and held in your kind and loving hands. We pray this in the name of our Savior. Amen.

Malachi 3:1-4 (CEB)

Look, I am sending my messenger who will clear the path before me;
suddenly the LORD whom you are seeking will come to his temple.

The messenger of the covenant in whom you take delight is coming,
says the LORD of heavenly forces.

Who can endure the day of his coming?

Who can withstand his appearance?

He is like the refiner’s fire or the cleaner’s soap.

He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver.

He will purify the Levites

and refine them like gold and silver.

They will belong to the LORD,

presenting a righteous offering.

The offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD
as in ancient days and in former years..

Luke 3:1-6 (CEB)

In the fifteenth year of the rule of the emperor Tiberius - when Pontius Pilate was governor over Judea and Herod was ruler over Galilee, his brother Philip was ruler over Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was ruler over Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas - God’s word came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. John went throughout the region of the Jordan River, calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. This is just as it was written in the scroll of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

A voice crying out in the wilderness:

*“Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight.*

Every valley will be filled,

and every mountain and hill will be leveled.

The crooked will be made straight

and the rough places made smooth.

All humanity will see God’s salvation.”