

Matthew 3:1-12

2nd Sunday in Advent

December 6, 1998

Here I am again, out in the wilderness with John the Baptist. I was out here last year, and the year before, and the year before that. Repent, repent, repent. Isn't it about time I made some progress. No more need to be down on my knees, no more need to be starting all over, no more need to turn to a whole new life.

Been there, done that.

That's what I'll tell John the Baptist this year. Go find some real sinners John. Go to the crack houses, and the bars. Go to the homes where a wife is being beaten, or where the compulsive gamblers live. Pick on someone who is really rich and sharing nothing. Go after those porno queens, and evil people who molest children. My knees are tired John, I've had enough kneeling. You won't get me down in the dust, this year John. I've been down in that river of repentance for the last time.

Let's face it, what kind of sense does it make for people like you and me to be asking God's forgiveness at the start of every worship service. We haven't loved you God with all our whole heart, we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. I feel like I'm just in this circle, around and around and around. Maybe if we started each service telling God and one another all the good things we have done this week we would get better.

If I have a problem, it is with other people, the people who want more and more for themselves but don't make any commitment to the community. They take and take and take but never give. They wear me out.

Maybe things would really change if we started our service with a moment of accusation. Every one of us here could write down all the ways others here offended us and failed us during the past week. I could tell it like it is with you. You could tell it like it is with me. God is on the side of truth.

In a way that is what John did, he yelled at the Pharisees and Saducees, called them snakes, told them they'd better change or else. Maybe we should all be John

and do some yelling at those crooked politicians, and those greedy manipulators of the financial markets or at religious leaders who don't practice what they preach. That would make a lot more sense than us repenting once again until I realize who is near.

John said, I am not worthy to carry his sandals.

Isaiah said, "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

Standing in his presence Peter cried, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am ^{a sinful} ~~an~~ evil man."

The truth is that I look pretty good in the darkness. Where there is little light I see that I am miles ahead of the really bad sinners. But the light is coming.

God is coming.

In Jesus.

I'm not worthy to carry even his sandals. The nearer I approach him, the more I see my own sin. Maybe I stand an inch taller than the corrupt politicians and the TV preachers out to make a buck, but he stands miles above me. I am not worthy.

Nor are you. And feeling bad about your sins won't make you worthy.

As the old hymn says, "Could my zeal not respite know, could my tears forever flow, all for sin could not atone, thou must save and thou alone."

The nearer I get to the light, the clearer I see myself.

And I am on my knees, not to gain anything, not to please anyone, not to pay for anything, but because I see the distance between him, and me.

Lately I've been doing some thinking about what we would want to be known for as a church. Our kindness, our love, our programs, our music? This morning I realize that there is only one thing we should be known as: A community that is on its knees because we are coming near to Jesus.

When Martin Luther spoke of repentance he said it was an every day dying. A

crucifying of our hope in ourself, and the birth of our hope in God.

Maybe good works will follow, maybe not. Maybe we will be glorifying God with one voice, maybe not, maybe wolves will be lying down with lambs, leapards and goats at peace in this commjunity of faith, maybe not. But if we are a community crucifying our hope in ourselves and being born in our hope of God then we will be heading down the right road. God will take care of the rest.