

MATINS Dec. 8, 2019. John Peters

Is. 11:1-10, Ps. 72:1-7, 18, 19, Rom. 15:4-13, Mat. 3: 1-12.

Theme verse. Romans 15:13. Closing hymn: Blue book, #

Today we hear the voice of a prophet, an Elijah, in a man named John. In sociological terms, John was without question, a DEVIANT. He dressed differently, his food intake was different. Likely, as a Nazarite, he avoided strong drink. He hung out in the wilderness. John was such a contrast to the man, Jesus who baptized. Jesus wined and dined with the people on the street. Add to all John's deviance, his message was deviant. For the Jew of that day, ALL would have identified John as a prophet, maybe a resurrected Elijah. Strangely, people left their fields, villages and the city of Jerusalem, walked many hours, to the Jordan River, on the edge of the wilderness, to hear what this man, John had to say.

There was another way in which John was distinctly a deviant, a not so "normal" person. He KNEW GOD. He was DEEPLY assured of this GOD matter, the God walk, this life changing experience: bold in speech before a large crowd.

The radical change John promoted was not the healing and social resolutions we hear today: education, a health plan, guaranteed employment, a pension, psychological counselling. John said, "Look at your sin." Repentance is essential. Without a loud speaker this man on the banks of the Jordan River shouted about a topic we don't like- SIN. Sin would be remedied by a super power, by GOD, by means of water. This was for everyone.

Let me present another story of preparing the WAY. In Oct. of 1958 a flight was made, with a drop of gifts, over an isolated village in the

Amazon River basin. The goal: **good news** to a people who had no good news, who needed a baptizer, a Savior. There was excitement when the MAF airplane dropped gifts in sealed cans with red cloth as flags, into the river. Shortly after this a team of four persons escalated the rapid-ridden tributary of the Amazon, to make physical and verbal contact. Then a wide PATH was constructed so that human messengers might arrive from the air, in what they identified as the yellow parrot. We worked in the heat, with a chain saw, hoes, shovels, cutlasses and wicker baskets filled with earth, building a path 280 meters in length and 8 meters in width in the jungle, for a very big event. This was preparation time. Huge trees three feet through had to be fallen and the stump removed below the surface of the earth. When we had about eight square metres cleared the local people said we should call the airplane. That was sufficient space, they said. We toiled on. Then the day arrived! The long awaited date had come. With a swish, the yellow parrot put its wheels on the earth surface and stopped on the eastern tip of this path. A **human** stepped out. **A human!**

The preparation time was actually lengthier than described. Brazilian government permission, an aerial survey, a call in North America for 20 missionaries, learning the Portuguese language, the training of MAF pilots, and after the building of this PATH, years of culture and language learning. All this before the real Message of peace, love, mercy as well as forgiveness was transmitted- to a people who had no word for LOVE.

In the Matthew account we have numerous symbols: John comes as an Elijah. We are at the Jordan River, the river where this people's parents crossed years earlier. Stones- brought out of the water on that journey, and placed on land to show DELIVERANCE, A stump with a shoot- gives us hope. Water signifies cleansing. Fire means

judgement. Chaff- burned, a process in harvesting, Sandals-HUMANS, not gods, wearing them on the earth.

Educated and religious PhDs showed up: Pharisees and Sadducees. Imagine- to the river bank and wilderness, to hear a non-formally trained speaker talk on their topic, religion. John uses the most vehement association of negative terms, pretty close to the F explicative. Without even hearing the Pharisees perspective, or allowing that possibly 2 or 3 persons among them just might be kind of good guys, he calls them “ a bunch of vipers”, with no hope! Your mouths have spewed poison. John would have failed any test in being discrete, sensitive or suave to his audience.

John’s message was **judgement** and **Repentance**. Let us not be too quick in dismissing this judgement message this morning. Paul says in II Cor. 5:10, “We will all appear before the judgement seat of Christ.” Fire burns chaff, and as Rohr says, the burning and darkness of our soul has the potential of bringing light and bearing good fruit. John said, “Look to this God, now in human form. He is much more significant than me. His baptism brings the Holy Spirit and fire!” I am nothing compared to him. I am not even worthy to carry his suitcase to the bus station.

In Matthew’s writing he continuously rebukes the learned Sadducees and Pharisees, saying, “Bear fruit of repentance”. This is what counts. It is NOT what you say. Live the life. So the message comes to us. Show spiritual fruit. Some months later, John was in a somewhat mixed up state, possibly depressed. He wondered about the authenticity of this God Man he had baptized amongst hundreds of people. Jesus was not doing the stuff John had expected. Jesus has an interesting response in Mat. 11.3. “What do you see happening? The blind see, the lame walk,

the deaf hear, lepers are cleansed, demons are cast out, the dead are raised to life, and the destitute hear good tidings.” Jesus spoke of the DOING, not the saying. We get the same message in our Roman text read earlier in this service. *Live the life of the Spirit and fire today.* Do this in our church, in our neighbourhood, at employment, with our brothers and sisters in South America and Africa. **“Become a servant. Glorify God together. Welcome one another as Christ did. Live in harmony with one another. In this manner the pagans will see and glorify God.”**

We close with the last verse of our Romans passage. **“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”**