

Advent 3 December 17, 2023

John 1:6-8, 19-28

John the Baptist

“A Wheelchair in the Waves”\*

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Holy Faith, Salene

May we know that voice of God when we hear it; in your holy name we pray. Amen.

(Please be seated.)

Good Morning.

There appears suddenly in the wilderness,

a man, a prophet

as in the days of old;

a man preaching and proclaiming

the coming of our Lord.

He was must have been an odd sort

—even by biblical standards

for he is one of the few characters

in the sacred texts

for which the authors spend

any length of time

describing his wardrobe and diet.

There is no mention of the outfits Mary wore,

or Joseph, and for Jesus

we only find about his seamless cloak

at the time of his crucifixion.

In the same way

Peter, Paul,

James, John,

Andrew, Mary Magdelene

are all major players,

yet fashion mysteries.

Not so with John the Baptist

we know his hair was a tangled mess,

we know he wore

a leather belt around his camel hair suit

—let's be perfectly clear

the camel's hair is not

just referring to the color of his outfit.

Picture it—long and shaggy haired,

roughly cured, smelly dromedary skins

wrapped strategically around his body

—held in place

by a leather thong of sorts.

That's his daily wear.

Our descriptive notes

don't end with the fashion ensemble,

but continue on to discuss

his high protein, high sugar diet

of grasshoppers and wild honey.

The honey we understand

—the grasshoppers are less comprehensible

both to us now

and to those who gathered then.

John the Baptist was an odd sort

—makeshift clothes,

wild hair and no doubt

—bad breath

and yet he was a man

with a compelling message.

Get your act together

don't even think of waiting much longer.

The time has come,

the Lord is at hand,

something different is on its way.

You can be left on the sidelines

or you can repent,

have your sins forgiven

and be ready for the one

who is coming after me.

It's your choice and your chance

for something different.

Something more.

John is the wild man

—who demands action and offers hope.

God is coming,

the messiah is on the edge of the horizon

—your life

—our lives

—our world can change.

Wade into the water,

take the risk

its time to be ready for the change.

If now were then,

and you were there—

would you have gone out to see this man?

Would you have ventured forth

with the notion

—the hope that our lives can change.

The following story,

by Blayney Colmore,

the retired rector of



St. James by the Sea in LaJolla, Ca

appeared

in the San Diego Union Newspaper

a while back.

I do believe it has a bit

of the modern day John the Baptist in it.

A week ago today,

Colmore was taking his customary swim

in the ocean.

He writes,

*Monday, there it was again,  
the wheelchair in the  
surf.*

*First time I saw it I was going for  
a swim  
on a chilly, overcast winter afternoon*

*feeling heroic  
water temperature 57 degrees  
no wet suit  
just me, cap, goggles and my old leather skin  
bucking the tide.*

*Just as I was about to dive into a breaking wave  
the wheelchair materialized in my*

*peripheral vision.*

*Being a do-gooder*

*I let the wave crash coldly against me and*

*waded wide*

*right to rescue the chair.*

*It was stuck in sand, wouldn't budge.*

*Struggling, I heard*

*someone shouting*

*over the sound of the surf*

*and turned to see a man*

*up on the walk stretched on his back*

*on an odd sort of bicycle*

*his head and feet level, his hands on the pedals.*

*Shouting at*

***me.***

*"Don't touch **the blank blank** [God damn] chair,"*

*I made out over the roar of the breakers.*

*So I didn't.*

*Went for my swim and was catching a ride in.*

*Something bigger than some seals seemed submerged  
in the wave  
next to me.*

*In the shallows a man emerged.*

*Younger,*

*broader shouldered than I, he*

*steered to starboard and dragged himself by his  
muscular arms*

*along the edge of the continent until he reached  
the wheelchair.*

*Gripping the metal arms, he waited  
for the full flood*

*of the next wave and, in a single mighty motion  
boosted his body into his chair  
clenched the wheels  
rocking so violently I thought he'd  
certainly capsize. He freed the frozen wheels and  
plied himself, through soft sand,  
to a van parked by the beach. (Pause)*

*I thought all astonishment had been wrung from me  
when he hoisted himself into the  
van's ramp, ratcheted up,  
swung into the driver's seat and drove  
away.*

*Starting to shiver from chill  
and awe  
I asked the  
Lying-down- bicycle- man,  
who had hollered at me,*

*to tell the story.*

*"We're spinal cord guys, training for a triathlon."*

*"Awesome!" I allowed.*

"Not really," he responded.

"We only feel that 57 degree water on half our body."

John the Baptist pushed people

to look at a the world from a different perspective.

John the Baptist

is like the spinal cord guys

training for a triathalon.

Appearing out of the middle of nowhere

in the wilderness of our lives.

Not there—and then suddenly brashly among us.

What's the wheelchair doing there?

Not a normal wheelchair.

But one-- frozen in the sand

—overrun by waves

—home to a man

—who does not fit ordinary categories.

A John the Baptist type,

appearing,

surprising those who come upon him,  
pointing toward a different path,  
a different way of understanding the world.

An individual

who does not let

the limitations of this world

set the boundaries for his hopes,

expectations and actions.

There's that wheelchair,

rocked by the waves,



silent sentinel,

reminding us

that there is so much more

that we can do,

that we can experience,

if we take the time

if we have the courage

to wander out into the cold water,

the water of difference and change,

the water beyond our land of comfort.

The Wheelchair,

wheels frozen in the sand,

parked among the waves

silently pointing out the possibilities

of moving past

what is now seen

and known

to what sits on the edge of the horizon.

The wheelchair—crying out

—“Lift up the valleys,

lay low the mountains,

level the uneven ground

and make the ragged places a plain.”

Then when all things are reversed

—when all things are turned

upside down and inside out,

then the glory of the Lord

shall be revealed.

Then our God will be made known.

One wheelchair,

parked in the ocean,

proclaiming God's ability

to turn our world upside down.

Advent is that time

—that sacred holy time

when God calls us

—when God beckons us

to move to the edge

of what is known.

Advent is that time

when God invites us

to release the limitations

we have imposed upon our lives.

Advent is the time

when God calls us

to venture into the realms

of new hopes,

new joys,

new possibilities

always aware that with God

so very much more is possible

than we can ask or imagine.

Every valley shall be lifted up

—and every mountain and hill laid low

—And then the glory of the lord shall be revealed

and all the people shall see it.

Amen.