



January 14, 2018

The Second Sunday of Ordinary Time

...*"What are you looking for?"*...—John 1:38

Dear Friends;

What makes Jesus so attractive a personality in his time and in our own? Today's Gospel passage gives us some insight.

John the Baptizer was out in the wilds of the desert. His message proclaimed the hopelessness of Israel under the domination of the Romans and corrupt religious/political leaders. The only way out was a radical conversion to receive the forgiveness of God. John was preparing people for a radical encounter with God. God would intervene in history. God will judge and act decisively to restore and renew the people, the land and the Covenant. Then people would enjoy a fuller life. The place where John baptized was thought to be the place where the people of God first entered into the Land of the Promise. John was saying it is so bad we have to start over.

John's baptism was a sign and commitment to radical change: personal, religious and political. Jesus' baptism by John was a decisive moment in the life of Jesus. His life would go in a new direction. The young craftsman from Nazareth would never be seen there again. He would devote his life to a prophetic work that would amaze his family and hometown. As part of the circle of John the Baptist's followers, Jesus shared in the mission and the vision of a coming encounter with God. In this inner circle of John's followers Jesus met Andrew, his brother Simon and their friend Philip. They were John's followers but in time would give their allegiance to Jesus.

The movement of John had reached people throughout the whole region. Even people who were cut off from society as sinners, like prostitutes and tax collectors, embraced the message. It was only the religious elites, the rich 1 percent, and the supporters of Herod who opposed it. Life was too good for them to want to change. John was trying to convert the whole land in preparation for the day of God's coming judgment. But he was killed by Herod before his mission was complete. What now would happen to the coming Day of Judgment and restoration?

Jesus will take up the mantle of John. But Jesus will take the message of John in a surprising and radical way. In John's mind, the time of preparation in the desert would be followed by the purifying judgment of God—a "baptism by fire." But Jesus was beginning to see the tribulation that people were experiencing in the context of mercy. This hopeless situation opens the door to the incredible compassion of God, not God's destructive anger.

Jesus left the desert behind. No longer had we to wait for the reign of God. It is already here, unfolding in our midst. Jesus proclaims "Good News." People need conversion not as preparation for judgment but to enter into the reign of God. They enter by accepting God's radical love and forgiveness. Jesus offers the life of heaven now to everyone—baptized and unbaptized. The only judgment is left to us—do we accept the invitation or do we reject it? God comes to everyone as savior not judge. But God does not force anyone; God only invites us to love and learn to love as God loves.

The parables, sayings, and miracles of Jesus are signs of that merciful kindness we name God. Jesus speaks to us of the nearness of God all around: in seed that is sown, bread that is baked, the birds of the sky, a flock of sheep, grain in the field, in a wedding celebration and meals that we share. With Jesus everything is different. No longer do we fear that we are not good enough. Our life has meaning because we are loved. Jesus invites us to trust in a God who is like a loving parent. This is what makes Jesus so incredibly attractive. He tells us we are loved, our life has meaning, and our life goes on forever in God. What more could we look for? We have found him and he is here!

Peace,

Fr. Ron

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