

## Greater Things Are Coming

St. Mark Lutheran  
Three services

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*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.*

*And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said.*

*(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. John 1:6-8; 19-28*

It has been said that many people generally tend to see their lives through the lenses of nostalgia, resignation, and fear. I made reference in my message two weeks ago about how many people long for the "good old days". I wonder sometimes whether those days were as good as we remember them. We had to live through problems and challenges then also.

When it comes to the present, there seems to a general feeling of resignation among many people. Many people have an uneasy feeling also about the future. What's going to happen in that troubled area of the Middle East? Will Iran acquire nuclear weapons? What is this show of power on the part of North Korea going to lead to...a nuclear war? On a more personal level, "Is my job safe? How will my children and grandchildren survive this time of moral decay?"

There is also some understandable distress among the people of St. Mark. Many of our founding members and others who have joined us are growing older. "How long do I have?" you may be thinking. "What health problem will I have in the future? Will I be able to deal with the health issues that I have now?" These kind of issues can bring stress and a negative outlook not only to the people afflicted but to family and friends who care about them.

John the Baptist, a cousin of Jesus, brought a message from God that there were greater things to come. There was hope because of the Savior who God had sent. But this Savior was not going to bring freedom from the Romans as was hoped by many. He offered something much more important than that. He offered reconciliation with God the Father.

Now most or all of you may believe that, but the world in general does not believe that. The world believes that it is sufficient to just acknowledge the existence of God and everything is going to be all right in the end. That is not true and that viewpoint is dangerous. It can lead a person straight to hell. Jesus Christ himself said this, "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (John 17:3) There is a huge difference between just believing that God exists and knowing God and his Son Jesus Christ.

The New Testament writer James, who was probably the brother of Jesus, attempts to set people straight about this with his words recorded in James 2:19: "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe-and shudder!"

Since the fall into sin by the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, our relationship with God has been broken. Instead of being holy as it was created, our human nature is sinful and our heart is the source of sin and corruption. Jesus himself said, "What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person." He went on to say that out of our hearts comes such things as evil thoughts, adultery, and murder, and a lot of other things that are wrong. (Matt. 15:18-19)

One does not have to look far to see how this has had a growing impact on the downward spiral of things in this world. You don't have to look further than your local newspaper to confirm the dreadful effect of sin in this world. Its effects can be manifested in ill health, loneliness, broken relationships, suffering, theft, immorality, brutality, desertion, drug abuse, murder, and a lot of other things. We all experience some of these things. They may be the result of our sin, or the sin of others, or simply the result of life in a sinful world. It was that way two thousand years ago, it is that way today, and it will be that way in the future until Jesus returns to end it all.

"Why doesn't God do something about this?" I have heard people ask. He has. He promised to Adam and Eve and to future generations that he would send a Savior to atone for sin and rescue us. God called patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to carry the promise from one generation to another. He sent prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah to prepare people for the coming of a Savior. At times he gave very specific information through these prophets about the Savior to come. We can count dozens of prophecies in the Holy Scriptures that Jesus Christ has fulfilled. The evidence is overwhelming that God is indeed active in the history of this world.

In our Gospel text this morning, we are told that God sent John the Baptist. Like many others, John had a divine mission. He was sent to "...bear witness about the light". John is quoted as saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He baptized people in the Jordan River and crowds of people came to be baptized by him. The Bible tells us that "Jerusalem and all of Judea and all the region were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins." His message was not meant to draw attention to himself, but to draw attention to Jesus. He was to bear witness about "the light of the world". He was a forerunner of greater things to come.

Each of the four Gospels has an account of John's ministry and message. It really was a foreword to what was to follow: the account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the proclamation of Jesus as the Savior of the world. Jesus is the one who God promised to send to redeem fallen mankind.

Well, John the Baptist is long gone. He was beheaded. Don't be concerned about him. He is better off than anyone on earth today. We are told this promise about our future in 1 Corinthians: "... no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him..." Greater things are coming!

Yes, John the Baptist was sent by God to preach repentance and tell the people that the kingdom was at hand and theirs for the taking. But with John gone, who has God sent today? It's a much bigger world, and it is in a downward spiral, and people are without hope or beginning to lose hope. There is a short window of life on earth in which people can receive God's kingdom, but who is going to tell them?

You know the answer, don't you? Jesus has sent the Church of Jesus Christ to tell them. We have the same mission as John. St. Mark Church has the same mission as John. Through proclaiming God's Word, we are to call people to repentance. It is our job to find those who are without faith, without hope, and without a church. To those who are afraid to die and come face-to-face before a holy and righteous God, we can bring comfort with the words of Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." For those facing uncertain times, God promises, "I will never leave you or forsake you." For those whose burdens are so heavy they wonder whether they can go on, we can share, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you..." (Psalm 55:22)

One more week, and we celebrate Christmas. God has been faithful to us; what can we do for Him? Are you willing to find one neighbor, one friend or relative, one family that has moved in during the past year, and invite them to worship God and learn about our Savior Jesus Christ this Christmas? Surveys of the non-churched show that well over half of them would visit a church if someone invited them. Are you willing to be that "someone", for Jesus sake? May the Holy Spirit help us to be faithful to our mission. Amen.