



Advent 3-December 13, 2020  
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish  
John 1:6-8, 19-28

## "The Voice"

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*The Pharisees had entered the temple for worship on the sabbath, but to their surprise nearly all the pews were empty. There was a usual number of people attending the worship the previous week. Something had changed. Jerusalem currently was not experiencing a pandemic of any kind. No shelter in place was put in effect to prevent people from coming to worship. The only thing different the leaders of the church were aware of was that they heard another preacher had arrived in the area. Could it be that everyone had left the comfort and beauty of the temple to listen to this oddly dressed preacher in the wilderness? The Pharisees needed an answer, so they sent a delegation of priests and Levites to find this man who was sent from God, whose name was John.*

*The first description we learned about this new preacher in the wilderness was that he was sent by God. The delegation of people looking for this preacher was sent by the church. John was sent to testify to the light. The delegation from the church was sent to investigate who was giving the testimony. The spirit of the Lord was upon John and he was drawing crowds of people in the wilderness leaving the pews and the offering plates in the temple empty. The priests and Levites that were sent by the Pharisees were not sent to find out what John was preaching, but to find out who this man was that was sent by God.*

*When they found the man, who had drawn crowds of people away from the temple, they asked him "Who are you?" But instead of John the Baptist telling the questioners who he was, he tells them who he was not. John confessed, "I am not the light. I am not the Messiah". John makes clear that the people who have left Jerusalem have not come into the wilderness to worship him. They have come to listen to him testify about someone who is coming after him. But since, this man has drawn such a large congregation, they assume he must be a big-name preacher. These learned religious leaders had heard about how Elijah had been taken up into heaven by a whirlwind and assumed maybe this man was this great prophet had now come back to earth. But John further denied being Elijah or any great prophet. These people who were sent by the Pharisees were getting tired of playing games with this backwoods preacher that seemed to be avoiding their question about his identity. One last time, they demanded to learn his identity and asked, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"*

*Then, John reveals his identity as one who is sent by God does. John said, "I am the voice." John is not God, but the voice that delivers God's word. John's business card doesn't have his name on it or any information about him, but just a picture of him with his mouth wide open and his long bony finger is pointing toward Jesus who is seen coming toward this crowd. In fact, in the very next verse after those you heard in the gospel from John today, John the Baptist retires from preaching. The last words the crowd heard from John's voice were "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*

*John's purpose of testifying to the light, his purpose of making straight the way of the Lord is done and he points to Jesus. But since Jesus also was sent by God, his message is the same good news that John the Baptist was preaching. His message is the same that you also heard in the first lesson for today that Isaiah who also*

*was sent by God delivered. His voice is good news to the oppressed. His voice heals the brokenhearted. His voice releases the captives. His voice comforts those in mourning. His voice delivers words of forgiveness.*

*Whenever John the Baptist is mentioned in scripture, so is the wilderness. Indeed, the wilderness was a geographic area where he lived and preached. Jesus was sent by God into the same place, the same wilderness where John was preaching. But Jesus also was sent to bring good news into the wildernesses, the dark places in the lives of these people. Jesus was sent wherever his light needed to break through the silence of darkness.*

*A seminary professor of mine served as a missionary for many years. Many of the places he served certainly would be considered wilderness areas far more primitive places than what some consider the plains of South Dakota to be. He wrote a little book called "The Mission of the Church" where he identified how the places needing to hear the good news of Jesus Christ had changed over his time serving as a missionary. Mission fields or wildernesses were no longer desolate places without running water or electricity. The mission field or wilderness has now become places that might have every convenience and luxury available to everyone, but places where God's voice is silent and waiting to be heard.*

*A year ago, we had hoped that the coronavirus was going to be like where the mission field was once thought to be. A place far away. A place few of us rarely traveled to. A place where the virus could be contained and it would not be a concern for us, at least for a long time. But the coronavirus has become what the mission field has become. It is not only in our country, but it is in our community and everyone has been affected by it in some way. I have not spoken with one person this ready who is not ready to hear a voice bringing some good news, even if this news is off in the near future.*

*Christmas is not far away and there is good news in Christmas. The good news is who John the Baptist was pointing to, Emmanuel, God is with us now in person in Jesus Christ. You and I do not need to go into the wilderness to find Jesus. Jesus goes into the wildernesses and finds the dark places of your lives and shines his light of hope with his voice.*

*Most people we know have electricity, but there are many people who are living in dark times. Long standing traditions of Christmas gatherings will be changed this year. Christmas programs that once filled our sanctuaries with families will be different this year. Darkness has come into the lives of the long list of people we have been asked to pray for each week. And what does God do when there is darkness? God sends someone to testify and point to Jesus. God sent John. God sent Elijah and prophets. God now sends you. In almost every conversation I have had with people this week, they have told me about a phone call that they had received from someone caring about them or their family. You have heard Jesus speak to you today. God now sends you to be the voice, not just to say things will be ok, but the voice, like John the Baptist, who points someone to Christ who is the light of the world. Amen.*