

Yours is the Voice!

Isaiah 40:1-11

Intro

This week Advent reminds us of the voice crying out in the wilderness. There have been several years where we read from the New Testament which means that we hear about...? That's correct! John the Baptist (gold star for you!).

However, this morning we are going to read from the prophet Isaiah which is whom the people in the early church looked toward to be able to describe the presence and work of John the Baptist. As I read these words, the familiar descriptors were there...and then there was this back and forth between the presence of God and the voice of the people (or the prophet, depending on how you read the passage). God declares that the people should 'cry out'...and then there is a response...and then a response to the response. It is in this back and forth that powerful imagery is provided that still resonates with our world today.

So my question is this, what are you crying out for? The scripture reads this way.

Isaiah 40:1-11

40 Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

³ A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

⁶ A voice says, 'Cry out!' And I said, 'What shall I cry?' All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever. ⁹ Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!' ¹⁰ See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹ He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

'Yours is the Voice!'

Have you ever been at the top of a hill or mountain? This question also works if you have ever been down at the bottom of a canyon? Alright, so have you had either one of those experiences?

My hunch is that most of us have in some manner or form.

Now place yourself into your mindset of a kid: what's one of the first things that you would do? For me (because I have several different memories of this taking place) I would holler out something to hear the echo.

The funny (and maybe slightly disconcerting thing is), every now and again, someone hears that holler...and they holler back.

This literally happened to me as a kid. My family had ventured out into the middle of nowhere Nevada (not it's actual name...but you get the point) and we got up to the top of this hill and we are looking around and there is nothing. So my brother and I yelled, 'Hello!'. We got the echo back. We smiled, enjoying that simple pleasure.

So we yelled again: 'Hello!'

About a second and a half later (just after we heard the echo of our voices), we heard, 'Yes?', at which point we stopped yelling because when the desert starts to talk, you know you've been in the desert too long.

The funny thing is, in regard to our faith, too many of us live our lives like those two kids up on the hill who heard someone respond to their call and get nervous to the point that they not only stop crying out, they don't say anything the next time they're on a different hill at a different time in their life.

We hear this passage and we gravitate toward what we know: 'A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'" That's what we know, and how we know it has us connecting those words to...John the Baptist, and that's where we stop. We hear these words as a describer of someone else as opposed to a call that is placed before the people of the Almighty.

But intentional faithfulness (last week's sermon is posted online by the way) means that we don't just go with the flow as to what we know, or at the very least, how we have known it: it means recognizing and following through on the call of the Almighty so that the truths of God are declared.

And just a reminder, it is not for us to wonder (let alone worry) how, or even if those truths will take root in someone else's life.

Instead, our call, our responsibility, is to cry out.

Hear again the words from the prophet: 'Get you up to a high mountain,...; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say..., 'Here is your God!'

Now I get that many of you will hear that and say to yourselves, 'that's still not speaking to me and how I live. That's a call to Isaiah or John the Baptist.'

Here's why I say that it is a call that still pertains to us here today: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey all that I have taught you'. The Great Commission, which was proclaimed by a resurrected Jesus to his disciples, is not an outlier in terms of God's desire to have those who have been led to place their trust and their faith Him proclaim that He exists.

Instead, it is a reiteration of how God had been working through the millennia right up to our generation and absolutely beyond: get up to your mountain top and lift up your voice with strength proclaiming, 'God is real!', and (by the way) do not fear.

This past week, I had my monthly chat with the children of the Nursery School. Being the time of year that it is, can you guessed what we chatted about?

That's right, ...Halloween!

You know the reality that kids say the strangest things, well, I asked the question, 'what day is coming up', and all of the kids shouted out, 'Christmas!', except for one who cried out, 'Halloween!'.

I looked at him with question in my eyes, and he said very quietly, 'I like Halloween'.

Anyway, I asked them what they think about when they think about Christmas and I got all of the answers that you would expect from a group of 3, 4, and 5 year olds. They are pumped about the presents, and the tree, and the presents, and the snow, and the presents. Really, they are excited about the presents.

After about ten responses, one of the older children raised his hand politely and said in a very definitive tone, 'Jesus birthday' which I was able to spring off of and read a children's version of the nativity story. That version of the story ends with shepherds, 'telling everyone what had happened'. So after we went through the details of the story so that I trusted that the kids knew the various people and places, I went back and asked the kids what the shepherds did after they left the stable. They responded, 'they told everyone!'

At which point I said, 'and so should you! So here's your homework, tell your moms and dads, your grandmas and your grandpas, even your brothers and your sisters, why we have Christmas at all: we have it to celebrate Jesus' being born', which, being pre-schoolers, they got all excited about.

Now you may hear that example and ask, 'and how does that pertain to me?'

Hear the words from the prophet again, 'Get you up to a high mountain,...; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say..., 'Here is your God!'

As we have talked about through the fall, how we respond to the responsibilities that are placed before us by the Almighty will be different for all of us because we all possess unique combinations of skills, talents, and blessings...but lifting up our voice, proclaiming the presence and reality of God (and in this season of Advent, the birth of Jesus) needs to be experienced faithfully and intentionally.

So maybe for you that means that you come out caroling tonight.

Maybe you invite your friends, family, or neighbors to the Live Nativity or one of the worship services.

Maybe that means (as we chatted about last week) that you are plugged into the world around you in such a way that you are ready and able to respond in love and care for the people who are around you, and yes, that absolutely may mean strangers that you will never see again.

Again, declaring the love of God does not mean shoving the name of Christ down other people's throats.

For example, Jen and I are shopping at the Home Depot over in Bridgewater a few weeks ago and as we are moving all throughout the store we are hearing Christmas carols and not from the speakers high

overhead: we're hearing them sung by three different employees throughout the store. These employees weren't aggressively proclaiming the truth of God and yet the message of God's presence and love were very much felt...because someone was (in this particular case, literally) willing to lift their voice.

Look, the reality is that there will be people who will bah-humbug you, or look at you with some sort of confused derision because the idea of God being real is viewed as the trapping of a bygone era.

But yours is the voice and our intentional faithfulness implores us to get up on whatever your mountaintop looks like and cry out without fear. Yes, you may get a response that causes you feel like you should be quiet, but the truth that God is real, the truth that Jesus was born into the world showing us how great God's love for us is, the truth that we have been led to believe needs to be felt, it needs to be heard...today.

Intentionally.

Faithfully.

Yours is the voice.

Raise it...let it be heard.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy and gracious God, we hear the message of the voice crying out in the wilderness and we think of John the Baptist, and we should. But help us to also think of the person whom we see in the mirror and empower us so that we call out in all the different ways that You have empowered us, showing and sharing Your presence, Your reality, Your love. God, You are the Creator of all and it is our responsibility to declare our faith intentionally today, tomorrow, and all the days that are to come. Lord, let it be so. Amen.