

NEXT STEP: STUDY & SHARE

READINGS

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Psalm 126

The Lord has done great things for us. (v3)

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, & open our ears to the words of your prophets, that, anointed by your Spirit, we may testify to your light; through Jesus Christ, our Savior & Lord, who lives & reigns with you & the Holy Spirit, one God, now & forever. Amen.

SERMON TEXT- John 1:6-8, 19-28

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests & Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰He confessed & did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." ²²Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. ²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" ²⁶John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

LISTENING TO . . .

GOD- *Christian life is rooted in the Father, Son, & Holy Spirit*

1. What connections do you find between *John 1:6-8, 19-28* & *1 Thessalonians 5:16-24*? How do the priests & Levites test John (v19)? How does he test them (cf. v23)? See also *Luke 3:7-18*; *Hint: look for themes, parallel ideas, inversions, reversals, similarities, extensions, metaphors, actions, vocabulary, grammar, etc.*
- 2.* What is the role of the Baptist *vis-à-vis* Jesus? What were his message & the purpose of his baptism? How did it differ from baptism in Jesus, according to *Acts 19:1-7*? What verse in our Gospel makes that same point?

EACH OTHER- *Sharing & growing with our brothers & sisters in Christ*

- 3.* Replace the name "John" in vv6-8 with your name & change the appropriate pronouns. Now read the altered verses aloud. Do they make sense? What are they saying to you? How do you fulfill these verses in your life?

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4. St. John points away from himself & to Jesus. Consider the Isenheim Altarpiece by Matthias Grunewald (c. 1515). en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isenheim_Altarpiece How does the painting's symbolism inspire your actions during Advent & Christmas? How does it expose your failures?

NEIGHBORS- *Bearing fruit for those not yet our brothers & sisters*

5. In the [Large Catechism](#) (IV 56) Luther writes regarding those who were baptized (as children) but did not develop into faithful adults, "Therefore I say, if you did not believe then believe now & say thus: The baptism indeed was right, but I, alas! did not receive it aright. ...in this I rest, that it is Thy Word & command. ...But this I know...that [he] will not deceive me or prove false to me." How can you point to Jesus & help a baptized, but-not-yet-faithful person develop into a fully devoted follower of Jesus? [LC available bookofconcord.org](#)
6. In this day's strange & manic combination of disasters, wars, *real politik*, increasing lawlessness, holiday commercialism, sentimentalism, & other cultural headwinds, how does your congregation stand like St. John in your community preparing the way for Jesus to come again?

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Third Sunday of Advent
Series: Love in the Ruins

12.17.23
Rev. Jared Stillions, STS

A Lonesome Voice

*With confidence & humility, one voice tells our ears
the truth our eyes can't see*

-Notes-

KEY VERSE: 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. (v23)

-NEXT STEPS MEMORY VERSE-

I am sending my messenger before you,
who will prepare your way before you. (*Matthew 11:10*)

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