**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

 **“The Word of God Came to John”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

Second Sunday in Advent, December 8, 2024

*Luke 3:1-20*

Today we think of the Secret Service as the people who protect the president of the United States, but did you know that they were originally formed and tasked with protecting the integrity of the dollar? Their job was to be the final authority on whether or not currency was real or fake.

It wasn’t until later that they were tasked with protecting important people. You might think that the best way to train someone to look for fake money would be to keep them up to date on all of the details of the fake bills going around. However, the way they would train is by memorizing every single small detail of the authentic, real U.S. bill. If they knew everything about the real thing, seeing the fake thing was easy.

There is nothing fake about John the Baptist; he is 100% authentic. He is *painfully* authentic. People like that are hard to get close to. There is no give or sway to him, there are no round corners, there are only sharp and jagged edges. It’s not like most people are fake but most people are willing to bend a little, give in a little here or there, avoid a little conflict, try to keep the peace with some concession, even if it’s small. There is no concession with John; he is 100% real and authentic.

To the Jews, John must have been like a relic from the past. It had been almost 500 years since there was a prophet in Israel. That’s a long time; Martin Luther was alive 500 years ago! Judaism had devolved into a worship of the Law and human tradition. The Pharisees had seized control of the worship of Yahweh. They had turned reliance on the Lord into a religion of reliance on yourself.

Out of the wilderness appears the figure of John. He speaks words of truth into the doubting hearts of the children of Israel. They knew that they couldn’t keep the Torah perfectly, let alone all of the other laws added to it. John wasn’t giving pep talks in the wilderness; he wasn’t telling them just try harder. John was telling the 100% authentic truth; they needed to repent. They were not keeping the law, and they needed forgiveness.

The crowds flocked to John. They were desperate for something real; they were desperate for a solution to their problem. John gave it to them, not with warm feelings or with clever words, but with the 100% authentic Word of God.

Our world today is desperately hungering for something real. There is a lot of fake out their today. There are churches that feed people watered down Christianity, hoping not to offend anyone and turn them away. There are churches that spend more time talking about how to be welcoming and hospitable than they do talking about God’s Word. There are pastors, politicians, influencers, celebrities, and more that just want to make you feel good about yourself.

Feeling good about ourselves is really one of the gods that we struggle with in America. We have fallen for the lie that our own happiness is the most important thing in our lives. The 100% truth is that happiness is fleeting. Like so many things in this world, it is here today and gone tomorrow.

We need something far deeper; we need the 100% true Word of God. We need to be like John the Baptist; unflinching, unswerving, unchanging, and authentic. If there is anything that people, especially young people, today can sniff out it is fake people. The world is full of hypocrites who say one thing but act in a different way. We need to be authentic and not just some watered down form of Christianity that we think appeals to people. We need to be what we are, authentically Lutheran!

Everything that we teach, everything we confess, everything that we do must be 100% authentic or else we are just another voice among all the other voices shouting around us. We need to know everything about the real Gospel. Every inch of it needs to be in our head and on our heart so that when the fake Gospel or watered down Gospel comes to us, we can see it for what it is!

I’m always surprised at the amount of pushback I have gotten from people when I say that what we teach in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod is 100% the truth, and every other church does not teach the truth. Sure, some of what they teach is true, but not all of it. Two conflicting views cannot be true. Either it is the body and blood of Christ on the altar, or it isn’t. Either the Bible doesn’t allow women to be pastors, or it does. Either I can pray with a stranger, or I can’t. Either God created everything in 6 days, or He didn’t. One position is true, and one is false.

There is a reason that most mainline churches are dying. People want the truth. People are desperate for the truth. They are desperate for authenticity. It’s only the truth that survives. God has promised that His church will never be destroyed. The gates of hell will never overcome it. His church isn’t a building, it isn’t a denomination. Luther gives us seven marks of the church: “the Word of God, Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the Office of the Keys, the Office of the Ministry, prayer and the cross (meaning persecution.)”

Those things will never fade away, and a church that devotes itself to those things above all else will never be destroyed. The church will never fade away because it is founded on the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is founded on the proclamation that Jesus came to this earth and died for the sins of the whole world. It isn’t a service group; it isn’t a social club. The only reason that this church exists and the only way that it will continue to exist is to proclaim the Gospel, to shine light into a dark world, and to give authentic Christianity to a world that is full of lies.

The Word of the Lord came to John so that he could prepare the people for Christ. John didn’t preach in the wilderness to grow his own popularity; John preached in the wilderness to bring people to Christ. The Word of the Lord has come to us as well. It comes to us through the Bible, from the mouth of a pastor, it comes to us in the form of bread and wine. John’s is our mission as well; we are preaching in the wilderness of America, trying our best to preach a pure Gospel so that as many people as possible can hear the message of that Gospel, and so that as many people as possible can receive the same gift that we have received, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Because one day, Christ is going to come back. One day, He will return, and He will bring with Him all those who have fallen asleep in Christ, all those who have lived their lives trusting in Him and Him alone, all those who have rejected the fake Gospel for the real Gospel.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.