

Pastor Roy's Sermon from June 24, 2012

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today is the festival of the nativity of John the Baptist. In other words, today is John the Baptist's birthday. No, we really don't know what day John the Baptist was born, but today is the day we celebrate his birth, life, and ministry because Luke says Gabriel visited Mary in the 6th month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Today is June 24th.

It was Zechariah's turn, as a lay priest, to serve in Jerusalem. He was offering the incense for the evening offering and everyone else had left the holy place, when suddenly the air was split with fire and thunder. He was no longer alone. The one to whom he offered incense had sent an angel. "Do not be afraid, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife will give birth to a son and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness and many will rejoice at his birth. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make a people prepared for the Lord.

"How will I know that this is so? I am old, my wife is getting along in years." It wasn't a good day for Zechariah. Compare Mary's response with Zechariah's. Mary asks for more information. "Tell me how this can work, help me believe." Zechariah says, "Show me a sign."

I love Gabriel's response. I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur. As Luke tells the story of the birth of John, that's what happened. Nobody believed Elizabeth, his wife until he wrote the words, "His name is John." Then he could speak.

The question comes to us as it did to Zechariah. "Do we believe that God is working in common and uncommon ways today?" Are we looking for God at work? When we find God acting, are we willing to join in the push for love, mercy, faithfulness, and kindness? Mary and Zechariah both had questions for what was going on. Even John had questions about who Jesus was and what kind of Messiah he was. Everyone, including John, was expecting a mighty warrior. Someone to set the record straight. To turn all these bad people back around to God.

But once John learned that the Kingdom/reign of God was a matter of justice and mercy, help for the poor, courage for the lost--then he said speaking of Jesus, "He must increase, and I must decrease." Even Mary had a learning curve for what it meant that her son was God's Son.

Faith is not a matter of figuring it all out and then never wavering from that truth. Faith is listening to God and learning to walk in that light of God. Its courage in difficulty, but courage to listen so that we don't waste our energy on things that run counter to God's mercy and justice.

Do our efforts make the world a better place for many or just a few? Do I act and believe based on fear? Or based on hope and faithfulness?

Is the cross of Jesus, the sign of God's strong peace--justice and mercy for all--is this cross the sign of our life together? Or...are we more concerned about our economic prosperity and what we believe

makes or breaks this prosperity. Do we trust in our own powers to save ourselves, or do we trust in someone far beyond us with meaning and a peace far beyond our own abilities. We often trust more in political answers than in the answers of the Spirit.

Here we find faith in the cross—the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not just to save our own souls, but a welcoming life that finds deep echoes in the universe beyond the confines of our own space and time. Are our lives in harmony with God's creation? Or are we spastically reacting to all the anxieties, fears, and instincts within us.

Camping this weekend helps us to listen more carefully to creation. Walking and resting in the midst of God's multi-faceted love is good. God is not calling us to do things we cannot do, but to do things that we can do--by the Spirit's gifting. Listening keeps us on target—keeps us in touch with God as it did for Zechariah, Mary, John the Baptist and many other saints throughout the ages.

Thanks be to God that by listening we can keep on the path of God's love and mercy. Amen.