

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

17<sup>th</sup> December 2023 – Third Sunday in Advent

**John 1:6-8, 19-28**

**POINTING TO JESUS**

A little while ago I began an address by asking you questions like: what is your favourite book? Your favourite movie? Your favourite song? This week I've heard that question being asked again on TV, but this time, not surprisingly, with a Christmas flavour: what is your favourite Christmas movie? Christmas song? Christmas family tradition? And it's great they ask these questions; this Advent time of the year is about focusing on and getting ready for Christmas. But what always strikes me about the answers which come in over the TV, or the radio, or the internet, is that usually they have no relation to what I see Christmas as being about. Favourite movies are often Die Hard (I cannot get my head around that as a Christmas movie), or Love Actually (great movie, but as a Rom-com, not a Christmas movie). The favourite songs people normally nominate are full of snow and cuddling up with your loved one in front of a warm fire; a bit far from my experience of Christmas. And Christmas traditions are about time spent with family, Christmas light tours, receiving gifts, special holidays; not always room in there for worshipping the birth of the Saviour. I don't want to be a grinch, but so often what would seem to be the most obvious focus of the Christmas celebration seems to be missing.

John begins his Gospel not with the birth of Jesus, but with the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, John the Baptist, telling about the Saviour, the light, who was coming into the world. John the Baptist came at a time when people didn't really know, weren't really ready, for Jesus' coming, which, as I reflect on what I have seen and heard over these past few weeks, doesn't seem very different to today.

And there's another part of the message here, too, for those of us who do know Jesus as our Saviour, who do see Him as being central not just to the Christmas message, but to our lives.

Back in 1979 the Oakridge Boys had the country song, 'Nobody Wants to Play Rhythm Guitar Behind Jesus', everybody wants to be the lead singer in the band. The exchange that happens in our reading always makes me think of that song. The religious leaders sent people to ask John the Baptist; are you Messiah? Are you Elijah? Are you the Prophet? And John kept on doing exactly what is said of him at the beginning of this reading; pointing to the Light, Jesus, who is coming into the world. But John the Baptist, to paraphrase that song, was happy to play rhythm guitar behind Jesus, he didn't have to be the lead singer. He knew that it wasn't about him, but that his role was as the one sent by God to prepare the way. Like so many others God gave support roles to in the Bible, and us today, John was a part of the support cast God has put in place to help people know the Saviour.

From this reading we can look at the message both for those who don't know, or don't really know, the Saviour, and those who do know Him but sometimes don't put ourselves in the right place in relation to Him. And, really, we can probably all at times put ourselves into both groups.

But the thing which is true for all of us, at all times, is that we need Jesus in our lives. Think about that. It might be hard to think about; but what difference does it make knowing Jesus, having Him as your Saviour, in your life? How would your life be different if you didn't have that faith? How important is it then that you don't lose that? And, what about that makes it a necessary thing for you to help others to come to know this faith also? When you think about these questions, do you think of words like peace, hope, forgiveness, joy, security, and comfort? Or are there other thoughts, words and feelings which come to you when you think about what it means, the difference it makes, knowing Jesus as the Saviour in your life?

The world, and each one of us, need Jesus, the light in the darkness, in our lives. In our world in which there is often conflict, and despair, and hardship, and sadness, all people need the One who comes through and above all of these things. We know, we often both see and

experience ourselves, the transforming difference faith and acceptance of all God has done for us in Jesus makes in our lives. But we know too, that this message isn't always what people want to hear, and so it is often hidden among all the other things, even at the time of the year set up to celebrate His birth. One of John the Baptist's replies to those questioning him about who he is was to say, 'But here with you is someone you don't know.' (v. 27b) How often can we apply those same words to our society? How often can we apply them to ourselves?

John the Baptist knew that his call wasn't to play the lead role, but to be another one of the supporters. He knew that his place in this story came solely because God had called and sent Him. Like Him, we also play this supporting role; pointing to Jesus. How do we do that? We do it by coming to worship, and by making that worship to be not about us, but about God, and His mission to all people. This is hard for us as people to accept sometimes, but worship is not about us, our preferences, our requests; it is about praising God and carrying out His mission. When what we think about what we complain about, what we focus on, if it's that things aren't the way we want them to be, we're not doing what John the Baptist is doing here, nor what that cute little song talks about; we are making it about us. In our church family, in every church family, there are so many different likes and dislikes, personal preferences, that if we each make it about me, we won't be around very long as a community; there is plenty of evidence of that around. In our worship, which is our community coming together to be pointing to Jesus, our call is to both make it about worshipping and praising God, and as a means for helping others to come to know and grow in their relationship with Him.

In our lives? We talk about this often. It is showing God's love, acceptance, forgiveness, in our words, our actions, our interactions, with others. It is in sharing what we've been given with those who are less fortunate. Again, like John here, it is in not making it about us, but about pointing people to Jesus. And as we are doing that, as we are handing everything over to God and trusting Him with it all, we're releasing ourselves through our trust in Him in a way which

can't really be explained, just experienced. To do this effectively is to just do it naturally, to show people that this faith is a part of who we are and what it means for us. Once again, we and all people need the light of Jesus in our lives, and in our world. The call for us all is to be considering how God both is and can be using us to take this light so that all can know Jesus.

We think of John the Baptist as the voice crying out in the wilderness; 'Prepare the way for the Lord! Make the path straight for Him!' When we think of our world, and our lives, and the lives of others, it is easy to see ourselves as being called to cry out in the wilderness, and as being called to bring light into the darkness. Our call is to be pointing to Jesus. In coming to Him, giving ourselves to Him, fully knowing Him in our lives, God both can and does use us as part of His work also. When you next have the opportunity to share what Christmas means to you, or about what is important to you in your life, consider how you can use what you do and what you say to be pointing to Jesus. Amen.

### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION**

- Thinking about it from a Christian perspective, what is your favourite Christmas song, movie, family tradition? What is it that makes it special to you?
- Take time to reflect more on what your faith means to you: what difference does it make to your life? Could you imagine life without it? Are there times or situations when you find your faith especially important or significant for you?
- Think about what it means as an individual to be pointing to Jesus, taking His light and love out into the world. What are some ways you are doing this now? Are there other ways God is calling you to do this also?
- What is worship to you? Do you find yourself automatically focusing on what you want worship to be? What is different in our worship when we focus on praising God and helping others to come to know Him?

Pray: thank God for calling us all to be His witnesses, pointing to Jesus. Ask Him to help us to continue to do the work we are doing for Him, and to see other ways He is calling us to serve Him also.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler  
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