

Our gospel reading for today starts off with a bang. It may not seem like it does, so let me read it again and set the stage and then I might toss the lectionary out of the window today.

*“As the people were filled with expectation”*

Those seven words are words that could define the whole season of Epiphany. If you are not aware, we are now in the Season of Epiphany. In this season, our eyes are open to the evidence of God’s revelation in Jesus.

In the passage that we read, we heard about the event. Jesus is willing and wanting to be baptized. This shows an act of humbleness. Now, Luke’s story is very different than the other Gospel readings. This is not the reason that I am going to toss out the lectionary. A better definition for what I may be doing is expanding.

If you paid attention, you would have noticed that we skipped three verses, eighteen through twenty. What you may not have noticed unless you have your bible out and reading along in the bible instead of the screen is that the lectionary probably should have started this reading in at least verse ten if not seven.

Now, I was not in the room when the individuals chose the lectionary reading but I imagine that they chose to start where they started and skip the three verses in the middle because they wanted to focus on Jesus not John, which is natural, especially when we are celebrating Baptism of our Lord Sunday, but I feel it is important to share the full story.

In verse seven John storms the scene and screams at the crowd, “You Brood of Vipers, you must change your life!”

Then let’s pick up the story in verse ten and hear the five verses that were not included in the reading:

**10** The crowd asked him, “Then what are we supposed to do?”

**11** “If you have two coats, give one away,” he said. “Do the same with your food.”

**12** Tax men also came to be baptized and said, “Teacher, what should we do?”

**13** He told them, “No more extortion—collect only what is required by law.”

**14** Soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?” He told them, “No harassment, no blackmail—and be content with your rations.”

John shares the need for them to act morally with three specific examples. John was a man that preached justice where ever he went. His justice talks were also always centered on the common needs of people because he was attentive to what was happening around him.

We are called to follow in his footsteps. In our affirmation of baptism, we make the promise that we will *“strive for justice and peace in all the earth?”*

Two weeks ago, the world lost one of the most devout human beings in Desmond Tutu. He truly was a light to the darkness and fought hard for justice especially when it came to race and LGBT issues.

Here are three of my favorite quotes from him that deal with justice and or injustice issues:

*“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse, and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”*

*“When we see others as the enemy, we risk becoming what we hate. When we oppress others, we end up oppressing ourselves. All of our humanity is dependent upon recognizing the humanity in others.”*

*“We are made for goodness. We are made for love. We are made for friendliness. We are made for togetherness. We are made for all of the beautiful things that you and I know. We are made to tell the world that we are here.”*

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*world that there are no outsiders. All are welcome: black, white, red, yellow, rich, poor, educated, not educated, male, female, gay, straight, all, all, all. We all belong to this family, this human family, God's family."*

So, now I have shared information on the verses that were not included in the lectionary; let us take a look at the three verses that we skipped. In those three verses, Luke throws a curveball into his story. The lectionary ignores the curveball. I want us to see the curveball but we will not spend too much time on it.

Here are the three verses that were omitted.

*There was a lot more of this—words that gave strength to the people, words that put heart in them. The Message! But Herod, the ruler, stung by John's rebuke in the matter of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, capped his long string of evil deeds with this outrage: He put John in jail.*

When we look at the life of John, we can see that he lived in a prophetic life. He stood firm and he constantly protested things that were going amiss in society. In the twenty-first century, we have had a shift. Individuals are constantly stating that religion and politics should be separated. However, in the first century, Jewish life; there was no separation. John's protest integrated the political and the spiritual.

There are still many contemporary Christians who attempt to stand up with their voice and with their feet in protest. They want to stand up and speak out on the injustices that they see. For them, they see that at times, they must question political powers when the political powers fail to serve the least of these. They speak up and against because of their spiritual act of commitment and then at times, Lutherans do it because they want to take their baptismal vows seriously.

And we miss the opportunity to speak to these issues when the verses are omitted. Let me be very clear, both John and Jesus lived in this tension. They both spoke truth to power and they both suffered for it to the point of death.

Now, for Luke and most likely the lectionary folks, this sequence is not so much about John baptizing Jesus but about the identity of Jesus. Thus, eliminating the aspect of John's arrest and John not being explicitly named as the baptizer. Thus, the reason for starting the reading where it started and why scriptures were omitted.

Thus, what is the identity?

It is clearly stated. After Jesus is baptized, he is praying and this identity experience happens:

*"You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life."*

In a quick read, I think that we can miss an important component of this story. Prayer. Following the baptism, Jesus prayed. The prayer opened the heavens and the divine revelation occurs. When we then step back and take a look at the life of Jesus, his prayer life accompanies the most significance events in his mission.

It is evident from the beginning, his baptism to the end, in the garden before his arrest and all the way in-between including his mountain top experiences with the transfiguration.

His teachings centered on prayer many times. In Luke, we see three parables that are centered on being people of prayer.

Yet, many times, we simply do not take time to pray. I think many times we fall into the trap, there is so much to do, who has the time to pray and what good does it do anyways.

This morning, I have shared with you about John the Baptist and his protest and the life of Jesus and his teaching on prayer. With us being in the month of January, we are going to observe MLK Jr day in eight days. This morning, I want us to hold onto prayer and protest in each hand. Martin Luther King Jr lived into a life of prayer. He shared that his deep commitment to a prayer life is what drew him into a

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protest. In one of his conversations, he shared that his nonviolent resistance movement drew on the words of Jesus where Jesus said, *“pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.”*

I am not sure about you but those are some powerful words and it causes me to step back and to reflect. We are asked to bless those who wish harm on us. For this to occur, we need more than a solid theological commitment. What we need is the spiritual act of courage that is deep-seated in prayer.

Early on, I used three of my favorite quotes from Desmond Tutu as it related to justice or protest. With speaking also on prayer and MLK, let me finish with two quotes from him:

*“To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”*

Then to close out the sermon, let me once again, close with a prayer but this time, a prayer from MLK:

*“God, help us to realize that man was created to shine like stars and live on through all eternity. Keep us, we pray, in perfect peace; help us to walk together, pray together, sing together, and live together until that day when all God’s children, Black, White, Red, and Yellow, will rejoice in our common band of humanity in the kingdom of our Lord and of our God, we pray. Amen.”*