

3 Advent, Year B

Isaiah 61:1-4,8-11

Psalm 126

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8,19-28

What would you say
is the most interesting thing—
the very *best* thing—
about you?

Take a minute.
Seriously.
Don't worry . . .
I'm not going to ask you
to stand up or tell anybody.

But just sit for a minute
and think about
who you are,
who you love,
what you love,
what you're good at,
what you're not good at,
the life you've lived.

What would you say
is the most interesting thing—
the very *best* thing—
about you?

It's funny the different kind of answers
you get to a question like this.

Some people talk about their career.
Others talk about their family,
or their origin, or their upbringing.

Sometimes somebody will just bust out and say,
"The most interesting thing about me
is that I love Elvis Presley!"

(That happened a few weeks ago
in Episcopal 101.)

But if John the Baptist were here,
he'd have a whole different kind of answer.

John wouldn't have talked at all
about the fact that he spent time
living in the desert.

John wouldn't have wasted time
talking about wearing camel skin
or living off of locusts and wild honey.

I think if John the Baptist
were right here, right now,
he would look us in the eye and say,
“You want to know
the most interesting thing about me?
The most interesting thing about me . . .
is Jesus.”

It's weird when you read the gospels . . .
you might look at them and think,
“Why is John even here?
The story's not even about him!
He's not even all that integral.
What purpose does he possibly serve?”

And yet, in two of our four Gospels—
in Mark and in John—
the story doesn't start with a Nativity.
You don't get the innkeeper or the manger.
You don't get the shepherds, or angels, or star.
You don't even get the sweet and blessed Virgin Mary.

What you get
is John the Baptist
bounding onto the scene
like some wild-eyed, vision-questing, paleo-diet hippy.

And there he is on the banks of the Jordan River —
waving, and preaching, and flailing—
doing all he can
to grab all the attention he can
to pull in all the people he can.

And why?
Not for him,
but for the One whom he knew
was to come after him.

Today's Gospel says,
“He came as a witness
to testify to the light,
so that all might believe through him.
He himself was not the light,
but he came to testify to the light.”¹

John is the advance man.
He's the forerunner.
The town crier.
The herald.
The fixer.

He's the one . . .
who's *not* the One.

I think this is really important
for you and me
given how we live in such a
self-appointed,
self-important,
self-referential
(and therefore *self-reverential*)
time.

It's always all about us.
And I'm not just talking about
politicians who grandstand

¹ John 1:7-8

or celebrities who captivate.
I'm talking about us.

We curate our lives.
And when we do,
we present only our best pictures.
We publish only our wittiest thoughts.
We crave being seen living our "best lives."
We're always trying to show
how completely,
ridiculously,
relentlessly,
interesting we are.

But I've got news for you:
news that may feel bad,
but that's actually good.

Whether you've had
a short life or a long life;
good health or bad;
whether you're
single, partnered, married, widowed, divorced;
big family, small family, no family;
dream job, dreary job, no job;
courage or cowardice;
rich or poor;
sinner or saint . . .
I am here to tell you
Good News.

Whoever you are,
if you're sitting in this room,
the most interesting thing about you . . .
is Jesus.

While that nullifies
the strength of your tweets,
the cuteness of your Christmas cards,
the perfection of your Facebook photos,
the narratives you tell yourself and others
about your health, and happiness, and success,

it actually ought to feel a lot like Good News,
like a huge load off your shoulders.

That's because in the end,
no matter who you are,
the worth, value, and prestige of your life
isn't yours to wrangle, manage, or produce.

You don't have to try so hard.
You belong to a God who loves you,
and that makes him
the very best part
of who you are.

So today we read the Gospel, and we ask,
"Why is John even here?
The story's not even about him."

The exact same
could be said of us.

Why are we here
when the Story's not even about us?

Simply put,
we're here not for ourselves,
but for the One who loves us.

We're the ones who *aren't* the One.
We're the ones who point the way.
We're the ones who know deep in our soul,
to our tremendous and eternal relief,
that the most interesting thing—
the very *best* thing—
about us . . .

is Jesus.

Amen.