

By: Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow

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Discouraged and Inspired

Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit...blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives...From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded. [Luke 12:35, 43, 48]



1 'Saint John the Baptist Preaching' by Luca Giordano

During Advent we encounter both texts on readiness, *and* John appearing in the wilderness preaching a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, preparing the way for the Messiah.

This time of seclusion and sequestering throughout this pandemic has been a kind of wilderness wandering: determining what is truth from what is fiction, and discerning a safe way to be

out in the world. It has been a time to rethink certain ways of being and living; processing and deciding what is really important - and what is really not.

And perhaps it is, as our scriptures remind us, about *readiness*. Are we really ready to accept the power of God into our lives, and the Messiah into the world?

So I wonder, how many times did God whisper “Go...Go to a place that I will show you...” before *Abraham* listened and went? How many burning bushes were there before *someone* - Moses - finally turned his head and opened his ears and heart to listen to the Great I AM? [Ex. 3] And how many times did God answer the prayers of barren couples and actually have them follow through on their promises - as Hannah and Elkanah when they dedicated their first off-spring - Samuel - to the Lord. [1 Sam. 1] And a thousand years later, as Elizabeth and

Zechariah, raising John in faithfulness to emerge in the wilderness preparing the way for the coming Lord.

And how many times did God go *outside* of the heritage of his chosen people in order to accomplish his mission as he did with Rehab, and Ruth, and King Cyrus? And how many times did God use *other countries* as refuge from famine, threat of harm and war, disaster and disease? And, I wonder, how many times were refugees refused and their lives cut short before they could accomplish their mission?

And, finally, how many young women did the Angel Gabriel approach before Mary, who said “yes” to God’s plan.



2 “Annunciation” by Edward Burne-Jones

How many, I wonder, were NOT ready to answer the call of God on their lives and as a result, how many hearts were broken, how many needlessly suffered, and how many lives were lost because we were not present to the whispering of our God? That’s what haunts me, and keeps me continually questioning, and continually hoping that how I perceive God’s call on my life is not merely a product of my own selfish wants.

Even Thomas Merton prayed: *My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.* (Thoughts on Solitude)

And so I wonder, are we really ready for the Messiah to come? Have we learned enough NOT to ask the question, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for everyone?” [Luke 12:41] IT IS FOR ALL OF US! When we separate ourselves into *us and them*, at whatever level we do that, we fall into Satan’s trap. It is the old war strategy of *divide and conquer*. We are strong when we are united, but when we think about *us and them*, we are weak. And I need to be careful because *us and them* creeps into my thoughts before I even recognize what I’m doing: us and them, Christians against Muslims against Jews, USA against Russia or China or N/S Korea, Israel against Palestine, fair skinned folks not understanding the injustices against darker skinned people, Democrats against Republicans, the wealthy justifying their wealth as people get sick and die from preventable circumstances due to their utter poverty.



3 "Feeding the Five Thousand" by Marten van Valckenborch.

We are more divided than ever. It seems that *everyone* is elevating themselves above *someone*. Where will it end, how will it end, and most importantly when will it end? Jesus said, *From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.*

It is easy to get discouraged. The virus is raging, people are getting sick and dying, and in this country we are experiencing a climate of mis-trust, resentment, and intentional chaos.

But then I am uplifted by the words of Teresa of Avila: *Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

And I am inspired with gratefulness by Jesus’ mandate: *From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.*

Let us all be *dressed for action with our lamps lit* - trusting God who has given us so much - commit to ushering in a kinder, gentler America; reflecting the Light of the Christ for a more just and peaceful world. Amen

Faithfully submitted,

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1 St John The Baptist

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%27Saint_John_the_Baptist_Preaching%27_by_Luca_Giordano,_LACMA.JPG

2 Burne-Jones, Edward. Annunciation, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=56515> [retrieved December 14, 2020]. Original source:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Edward_Burne-Jones_-_The_Annunciation_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg.

3 Valckenborch, Marten van, 1534-1612. Feeding the Five Thousand, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.

<http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=58165> [retrieved December 14, 2020]. Original source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marten_van_Valckenborch_-_Feeding_the_Five_Thousand_\(July\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marten_van_Valckenborch_-_Feeding_the_Five_Thousand_(July).jpg)