



## ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Sermon  
12-14-14

Has anyone ever said to you that they don't want to pray or ask to God's will because they are sure God will send them to deepest, darkest Africa to be a missionary, or something like that? Or maybe you thought or said that yourself. There seems to be some sort of fear that if we give ourselves over totally to following God and God's ways, God will ask something impossible of us or send us into a situation or life we'd find scary. And I'd say we have a pretty good reason to think and feel that way.

I mean, just consider the people in today's readings. Isaiah has an experience with one of God's angels touching his lips with a burning coal and then Isaiah hears God asking him to be sent out to speak for God amongst a stubborn and rebellious people, which he does for the rest of his life. Here today we have Isaiah proclaiming good news in God's name. Good news for those who are struggling and having hard times. Good news that some things are going to change in the land and righteousness and praise will spring up before all nations. It's going to be God's land and God in charge.

And we have Mary singing out about God's greatness and how he will make the land better for those who need help, while the proud are scattered in their conceit and the rich will be sent away empty.

Next we have this strange man named John the Baptist as the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. He's telling folks they have to repent and prepare for a coming Messiah who will change things in the world, one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

No wonder we don't want to follow God and be commissioned as witnesses – having to tell the world that things are going to go differently with God in charge. Questioning and challenging the dominant culture of the day, telling of a different source of authority, living as persons never completely at home in a fallen world. If we look to Isaiah and Mary and John the Baptist and Jesus as our icons, our guides, our teachers, our mentors – there's no hope for us. We will live in this world as Peculiar People.

Because I don't think you can imagine Isaiah, John, Mary or Jesus as anything other than peculiar while they lived on this earth. Isaiah had to walk about preaching the downfall of Jerusalem and the turning upside down of the world of the Judean people. Their world, their rituals, their traditions were crumbling, the temple destroyed. All had to be rebuilt. Isaiah was a voice many did not want to hear.

And Mary finds herself as a virgin pregnant with someone very special. Someone an angel tells her about and then she has to live the next nine months as an unmarried pregnant woman pledged



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to a man also trying to figure out a strange situation. Then both of them live raising and learning from the Son of God as their child.

John the Baptist stand out as one peculiar guy - wearing camel's hair clothing and eating honey and locusts and standing in a river admonishing people to come receive a baptism they had never before hear about. Weird. There he is - pointing the way to a Messiah like he knew something that those in charge of all matters religious didn't know.

Then along comes Jesus and he declares a changed authority in all the world. He declares a changed family structure in which those who follow and listen to him are considered to be a family, opposing current societal norms. He declares that those in charge currently have it wrong. How'd you like to live the tension of his life?

And yet we do, we do. In living the radical world of faith – we must live as peculiar people. It is us, us as Christians, us as vessels of the Holy Spirit and God's grace who must proclaim the good news of God in Christ. It is we who must question the culture of our day, we who must tell the rest of the world that true authority rests in God and God's mercy and God's equality and in God's everlasting presence and power. It is we who must stand in the wilderness of our society and buck the trends of consumerism, the false calls to value possessions and beauty and wealth, we who must oppose the judgments and closed hearts that don't value all of creation.

It is we, as peculiar people who were there to support the integrating of schools in 1954- we who offered support to the changing of laws that would allow people of different ethnicities to marry each other in 1967. It is 11 women who were ordained as priests in the Episcopal Church in 1974 who stood to declare a new way to live in this church.

And it is up to all of us today, all of us who are willing to join with Isaiah, and Mary and John and Jesus and proclaim the freedom and mercy and grace of living listening to the Holy Spirit – that voice that asks us to change ourselves and our world. We have proclamations to make today and our voices and our witness will spread through the grapevines and networks of this community and make a difference.

For even if you dread letting God direct your life – let me point out to you that Mary's proclamation was one of rejoicing, and Isaiah found himself greatly rejoicing in the Lord, and John was filled with a power and presence that changed people's lives, and the writer of Thessalonians assures us that this life is one of rejoicing, praying, giving thanks, and delighting in the Spirit. For the one who call us is faithful and that God gives us peace.

Thanks be to God.