

Advent 2, 2008
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Mark 1: 4 – 8

In the Gospel lesson I just read, from Mark chapter 1, we are introduced to this guy John the Baptist. John was a unique individual, I think the Bible makes that plain—the way he dressed, what he ate for lunch each day, locusts wild honey, mm mm good—a unique sort of guy, John the Baptist. But above all, he was a man of faith, whose whole life was about knowing and doing the will of God. The life and times of John the Baptist, his message for us today—and we begin with prayer:

Father we thank you for John the Baptist, and the ministry he fulfilled, and the faith he lived. You were everything to him, and he followed you without hesitation and without fear—grant such faith to us Lord, and lead us along the way each day. In the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.

Living as we do in this part of the country, I'm sure all of you are at least a little bit familiar, with our friends the Amish. When you encounter someone who is Amish, it's not like you have to be told, "Hey this person is Amish"—their appearance, gives them away immediately. The men with their broad rimmed hats and full beards, the women with their white bonnets and long, plain dresses—that is no longer the fashion style of most people in America, ok. It is instead very OLD-fashioned, and you notice it right away, the clothing worn by the Amish has a way of announcing their presence; and maybe saying something about them and, their way of life.

Well, with that in mind, John the Baptist. The Bible makes a point of describing what John wore, and it's because to people back then John's *wardrobe* if you will—was very old fashioned. It was quaint, and it caught your eye the same way the Amish catch our eye today, and for the same reason. You see John wore the kind of clothing that "normal" people had worn, 500 hundred to a thousand years earlier. Now to us of course, ALL the people in Bible times were dressed in ways we wouldn't exactly understand, they ALL would look more than old-fashioned, they'd look like they belonged in a museum; but of course these people when they were alive, had their own sense of fashion, and style—and they looked at John and saw right away, a man who was *out* of style, a man who was intentionally out-of-step with the times. They saw a man who was a throw-back, a man who was old fashioned, on purpose. The way the people remembered

how Moses must have looked, the way they remembered how Elijah must have looked?—well John appeared in that same sort of a costume, and he appeared to them out in the wilderness, preaching about God—just like Moses and Elijah had. Everything about John was a throw-back, to the “kinder simpler more faithful” times of Moses and Elijah, which, ok, may not have been all that kind or faithful either but that’s what people thought. And I have no doubt that some folks went out to John the same way some tourists go out to the Amish today, and that is, just for a little bit of a nostalgia trip.

And if that’s what you went to see in John, boy were you in for a surprise. If you went to see John the way school kids might go to Litzenberg Park today—well, time for a different field trip. John’s message was not nostalgic in the least. John’s message was not re-assuring, it was not a soothing little journey into yester-year. It was in-your-face preaching, about the sins you know are and continue to be a part of your life, sins you simply cannot or will not let go of. This is all about confession, now. This is all about repentance, now. This is all about you examining your life today, looking at it the way God must surely see it—and admitting where you have gone wrong, as a prelude to turning your entire self over to God, this instant. John was not a soothing little trip down memory lane. John was all about right here right now—confession, repentance, change. Yielding control of your life to God and becoming at long last—the person God wants you to be.

Well. Here we are in church. And there you are sitting in nice, fashionable clothing. And I’m wearing a robe. A couple thousand years ago, to walk down the street wearing a robe like this?—I’d be in style kids. I’d be happening. To walk down the street wearing this today?—yeah, I know, film at 11. Much about the church certainly is a throw back, to say the least. Now to me, church is timeless, by which I mean, if you didn’t know the year and walked in this morning and saw the room and heard the music and read the Scriptures—it could be 1908. Or 1508. Or 2108. Time doesn’t matter quite the same way in here, and that I think is important, when you’re not worried about the time you can focus yourself more easily on the eternal, that’s good. It is. But. I

suspect like the people in the Gospel, lot of folks come to church, for the nostalgia? To see the room decked out like it was when we were kids, to sing those old-time songs—it's very human it can be, nostalgic.

Ok, but that's not the message. That's not the Good News we proclaim. Like John, looks can be a little deceiving that way—the real point is not a soothing trip into yester-year, the real point is confession and repentance and yielding control to God, right now, today. What sins are there in your inmost heart? How long have they been there, and isn't it past time to give God the chance to clean them out and so change your life? There is no one here today in step with God—our sins would be very out-of-style in the Kingdom of Heaven. The anger the greed the envy. The poor me approach, the lunchroom gossip, the pride that will not give an inch, we are not the people God wants us to be, we would be very much out of fashion in the Kingdom of Heaven. Time therefore to get in step, time to let God make His style, your own.

The Good News of the Gospel—Jesus Christ, to whom John pointed. Jesus Christ who died to forgive you and then rose again to save you. Jesus Christ who will one day return to this world as Savior and King, Jesus Christ is very much in style in heaven. His way will be, the wave of the future on earth. His call is to you now, His promise is *for* you now—love and mercy and the power of His Holy Spirit in your life, today. May we all now be met by this Jesus Christ, and may He outfit us all, in the style of His eternal Kingdom.

In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, AMEN.