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Epiphany 1 –C – January 12, 2025

“Is There Room for a Prophet?”

Read: Luke 3:1 — 22 and/or memorize: Luke 3: 16

After some last-minute Christmas shopping with her grandchildren, Grandma was rushing the kids into the car and 6-year-old Jason said, "Grandma, Susie has something in her pocket." He reached in and pulled out a new, red barrette.

She was tired, but Grandma knew it was important for Susie to take the barrette back to the store, tell the manager what she had done, apologize and put it back where she had found it. So, they did just that! Later, they stopped for a few quick groceries and at the checkout, the clerk asked, "Have you kids been good so Santa will come?" Big brother, Jason, said, "I've been very good, but my sister just robbed a store."

Obviously, at four years old, little Susie didn't fully understand the commandment "Thou shall not steal." Part of that misunderstanding was human nature and the desire to take whatever you want. Part of it was simply her age and inexperience. Misunderstandings like that happen all the time.

For example, the character in our scripture today, John the Baptist might seem odd to us at first. Yet, Malachi, hundreds of years earlier, said there was going to be a Messenger to prepare the way for the Lord. Luke gives us some very specific details in our reading to place John in the historical record.

He also reminds us what this Messenger was coming to do. I'll use his words, which come from Isaiah: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'prepare the way of the Lord, make His path straight. Every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of the Lord.'" Isaiah and John spoke prophetically.

Which leads us to ask the question, "Is there room for a prophet today?" Will any prophet today meet the same fate as Mary and Joseph did as they tried to find room in Bethlehem? Is there room in our lives for a prophet? And the answer is, "Yes!" Because we need someone to prepare us and point the way.

I'm not a big fan of food shows, but when I've watched I've noticed that many chefs do 30-minute meals, but they kind of fudge. You see them pulling ingredients out of this little fridge or from a bunch of bowls with the items all prepared, so you can get it done in 30 minutes. That's OK. After all, who wants to watch vegetables being diced? But, don't you think they ought to add in that prep time?

We've just finished the Christmas season. Everyone knows that Jesus was born in a stable. Yet, about two weeks later, baby Jesus is getting baptized as an adult. So, we need prep time for that jump. We need to get ready for the baby from Bethlehem becoming the Messenger of God. People have to get to know who Jesus is. 1. Relationships are really important to Jesus and to us.

Dr. James Moore of St. Luke's in Houston, met a friend for breakfast. His friend is a sales rep. for a large national company. His friend told Dr. Moore about a recent exchange with the new sales manager for the region. As the friend was driving the boss around town, they passed his home. He asked the boss if he would like to meet his family. His wife was baking an apple pie, and the children would be coming home from school.

"Let's get things straight right now," the manager replied brusquely. "I'm not interested in your family. I'm not interested in your wife or your children. I'm not interested in you personally or any of the circumstances of your life. All I'm interested in is knowing you're hitting your sales quota!"

The friend told Dr. Moore, "That really hurt. I felt as though someone had slapped me across the face. But you know, it helped me realize something. My manager may not care about me, but I know that God does! God knows my wife and my children. God cares for us and is interested in all of our lives."

2. Just as it was vital that we get ready for Christmas, it's vital that we get ready to live the life that Jesus is calling us, too. We need someone to prepare us and help us, so that we take the proper time to learn how to serve Jesus, so we can make Him known to others, which is the focus of Epiphany.

We need someone, a prophet, lots of prophets, to remind us of what and who the Epiphany season is really about. To remind us that we are blessed beyond all blessings, so we can be a blessing. We need a prophet to remind us that the first ones to know were the poor shepherds watching their flocks.

And we especially don't want to forget what they did on the way back. Luke tells us that they told everyone they met what they had seen. 3. The shepherds were, in a sense, the first

messengers of Epiphany, making Jesus known to the world. We need prophets to remind us that Jesus came and what He did.

Finally, we need someone to point us in the right direction out of the wilderness. Sometimes, we get lost. We lose our way. Maybe, we used to know who we were and our purpose. But one day, we found out we're really lost in the wilderness and can't remember who we are or what we're here to do.

And as we realize that, we want to remember one other thing. There are those who have never known their way. They never knew or were never told who they are and to whom they belong. They never knew they had a purpose. They're really lost.

I suspect the reason we see so much anger, hurt and conflict in our world, is because people have never known the love of Jesus and his purpose for them. Their lives have been lived in the wilderness and never learned of God's love. 4. We need someone to point us in the direction out of the wilderness. We need a prophet to point us to Jesus.

As a pastor was getting ready to distribute communion, he invited those who were assisting to please come forward. This was a large church, and there were many assistants. He was a little bit confused. Standing before him was a tough looking fellow with numerous tattoos on his arms. He had never seen him before.

The pastor figured he was someone who had been designated to serve and he just didn't know him. He handed the stranger the tray for bread and a cup. The stranger gave him a strange look back, but took the tray and the cup and walked off with the other servers.

A moment later, he returned and whispered, "which of these do I eat first?" The pastor realized that this young man was totally unfamiliar with communion. He explained that most people ate the bread first, then drank from the cup. "Should I do that now?" he asked, his nervous hands shaking as he held the elements.

"Why not?" said the Pastor. He took the tray and the cup from the man and offered him the elements. Gingerly, almost cautiously, the stranger took the bread, then drank from the cup. "You have just taken Jesus into your body." The pastor smiled, trying to encourage him. The young man's eyes filled with tears. He was embarrassed and quickly returned to his seat.

After the service, the pastor saw the young fellow coming towards him. He threw his arms around the pastor's shoulders, and began weeping loudly. The pastor stood there and held him as he cried. Then a young woman came to them.

"I'm his wife," she said, her eyes also filled with tears. "He's so embarrassed. He's never been at a church service in his life. He's been on drugs and alcohol for years. This week he accepted Jesus as his Savior and asked to come to the service this morning. I told him there might be a time when he could come forward and say he accepted Jesus. That's what he thought you were saying, until you handed him those items. He was confused and didn't know what to do with them."

The pastor looked into the young man's face, whose once-hardened features were soft with tears. "God loves you so much," said the pastor, smiling "He saw you take that tiny step towards Him and, overjoyed, He placed in your hands the most precious gift the church has: the Body and Blood of His Son, Jesus. He wanted you to give Jesus to other people." "But I didn't know what I was doing," the young man said, as he was weeping.

5. "My son, none of us knows what we are doing," said the pastor. "We just seek to obey God. God honors our obedience by blessing us. The only ones who receive nothing are those who do not step out. There is no wrong time to accept Jesus."

The season of Epiphany reminds us that there is no time or wrong way to come out of the wilderness and accept Jesus. That is why Jesus came to the waters of baptism, so that He could obediently carry out the ministry that His Father had given Him. We need a prophet to point us to Jesus. 6. Epiphany reminds us that we need to be a prophet, pointing others to Jesus, so they get to know His great love for them, also.

Count me in: How will you help other people know Jesus?