

So for the last few Sundays I've been walking you all through the A's of Advent. What did we talk about on the first Sunday of Advent? Its right there in your bulletin. The Arrival! We as the people of God gather this season to celebrate and believe in the first arrival of God at Christmas in the birth of Jesus and we wait with patience and hope of Jesus' second coming. At what time no one knows but who? The Father. We learned we must live in a constant state of readiness until that day He comes. Where must we go to be ready for His Appearance? We must go to the wilderness and return to God through repentance.

In a beautiful reflection on Advent published in the Washington Post this week, columnist Michael Gerson describes the choice that is before us during this holy season: "On the evidence of our senses, despair is perfectly rational. Entropy is built into nature. (Disorder is built into the natural order of things) Decay is knit into our flesh. By all appearances, the universe is cold, empty and indifferent... This leaves every human being with a choice between despair and longing. Both are reasonable responses to a great mystery." [Hopelessness or Hope]

Jamal khashoggi was a Saudi Arabian journalist who was also a fierce critic of the Saudi Arabian government, and especially of the Saudi monarchy. Because of death threats that he received he felt he needed to leave Saudi Arabia in 2017. So he came to the United States and he became a columnist for the Washington Post. During that time he got engaged to be married and he needed some legal documents and so he went to the consulate in Istanbul Turkey to get them. This was on October 2nd and he never came out. We now know that as soon as he entered he was murdered by a group of Saudi Arabian agents who had been sent there to kill him and they then disposed of his body in a rather gruesome way. He wasn't the only journalist killed that year. At least 27 journalists around the world were targeted specifically for what they had been saying, in the exposing of the truth that they had been writing. Maybe more than 45 journalists

that year were murdered. Many of those who were killed were working in places like Mexico and Russia. Many of them who worked in Mexico somewhere were murdered by drug cartels and those who were murdered in Russia were most likely killed by the government.

John the Baptist was not a journalist, but he was in some ways the ancient world equivalent of a journalist. He was a prophet. A truth teller who talked about the government, revealing corruption and criticizing the government. In his case he was criticizing the government of King Herod Antipas and criticizing King Herod himself for divorcing his wife and then unlawfully marrying his brother's wife. This was pretty dangerous to do, criticizing the government, an Autocratic government at that, is a very dangerous thing to do and it takes a lot of courage and a lot of integrity and John the Baptist had both. And its what got him arrested and thrown into prison and then eventually he was executed by beheading. But before he was beheaded he sat And while he was sitting there in prison preaching about the coming of the Messiah he was telling people you better get ready right away you better straighten up your lives and turn them around because when this Messiah is going to come he is going to have a winnowing fork in his hand and he's going to thresh it and separate the wheat from the chaff and hes gonna take that wheat and put it in his granary and take the chaff and burn it in a fire.

And then John the Baptist said even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees ready to cut down any tree that doesn't bear good fruit. At the Jordan River after Years Gone by we don't know exactly how long but now John's in prison where he is proclaiming these things but is then perplexed because instead what he's hearing is that Jesus is having dinner parties with sinners and forgiving adulterers. What in the world is this?? Where is the fire and brimstone that he thought Jesus was coming to bring? Where is the judgment of the world? So John has one of his disciples take a message to Jesus with a question “are you the one I'm waiting for or should we

look for someone else”?. in roundabout answer Jesus tells the disciple to say to John “the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the poor have good news brought to them, and blessed is anyone who doesn't take offense of me. That's an odd answer.

- Amish story – go ask neighbor if I'm Christian or not
- What does it mean to be Christian
- Actions speak louder than words
- Jesus is saying you decide if I'm the One by what you hear and what you see...

There is this old story I heard this week about a person who went to a wise man and asked which religion is the true religion that comes from God and the wise man said will let me tell you a story I once was a man who had a magic ring kind is three children each one is there inheritance so he invited the local jeweler to come to his Deathbed and he said take this ring and I want you to make two exact duplicates and then the man gave his children we're a bit perplexed by this and and bothered by this they didn't know who had the magic ring are they fought about it and they couldn't resolve it court judge to look at the three rings I can't tell them apart and in time become clear who has the magic ring. and then the man gave his children each one perplexed by this sand and bothered by this they didn't know who had the magic ring are they fought about it and they couldn't resolve it until they decide to take it to a judge so simple way of finding out and in time will become clear same thing is true the wise man then says about religion which is the True Religion it'll become clear when you look at what their followers are doing Jesus after getting his reply to John the Baptist look at his Integrity look at his life this was a true Prophet who was even more who prepares for the odd statement about John the Baptist the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he what what does that mean it didn't that mean John the Baptist didn't make the cut to heaven or what it what does this mean very strange

statement call Matthew when mastering uses the phrase released or the least of these he's referring to followers of Jesus a possible church this is how followers of Jesus referred to who was the way of being humble instead of being arrogant about being Christians they were being very humble about being Christian we are released if we take this word the least to me followers of Jesus then listen to this verse again I tell you what those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist get followers of Jesus the Kingdom of Heaven are greater than he I think what Jesus is saying followers of Jesus are doing something even wanting to they follow Jesus John Jesus Jesus are in a sense taking the reign of God who are followers of Jesus we are now the embodiment the Messiah in this world SA so that means that today when people ask is Jesus the Messiah Jesus would answer that today would be to say look at my followers and see what they're doing.¹

¹ Ryan Ahlgrim, pastor of First Mennonite Church, Richmond, Virginia, *A Sermon for Every Sunday*