

3RD Sunday of Advent Cycle B December 11, 2011
Isaiah 61: 1-2a,10-11 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 John 1:6-8,19-28

They presented themselves before John the Baptist in a state of seeming emergency. They were on an important need-to-know mission. And John spoke the truth as he always did. He gave them a little rope. And unknowingly on their part, he also gave them a little hope. However, he didn't give them the whole 9 yards worth of rope. Because he couldn't.

He gave them what he could on their need-to-know-mission. He provided them information he somehow knew from his own relationship with Yahweh. So on this need-to-know mission of trying to figure out why this baptizer was drawing so many people away from their day jobs and inviting them out to a deserted place, in the end they don't get all the information they were searching for.

However, the first bit of information received from John is freely given to the Levites and priests in the negative. "Who are you?" they ask. "Well, I'm *not* the Christ," he answers. A truthful answer given in the negative. John is a truth-teller. We need our children – and adults - to be truth-tellers. To face all our fears when we go astray, and tell the truth. John does this.

We can sense their frustration at John though, because he's drawing a crowd like he was the emcee handing out the Country Music Awards. He's very popular. People are coming to him from all over because word spread quickly that he was handing out awards. In this case, the award of baptism.

But he's not Christ or Elijah he tells them! So they ask their next question, "So what do you have to say for yourself?" Being the truthful man that he is, he gives them a little more rope. And a little more hope. *He's the voice of preparation.* "There is one among you whom you do not recognize, (there's the honesty) the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie." In comparison to what is coming, John, of whom Jesus said there is no one greater born of woman, is not worthy to perform the lowest job of the lowest servant.

Yet, the one referred to is among us, John says. He's out there in the crowd. Right now! He's right in the middle of this congregation. Maybe he's in front of you, or in back of you. Turn to your left and to your right; you might see him. Look within, and you will definitely find him. Otherwise, we wouldn't be here.

I sort of feel like John the Baptist giving you a small piece of rope. But not the whole 9 yards. The reason being, that, like John the Baptist, I *can't* give you the whole 9 yards. Neither John nor I was/is capable of providing that level of fulfillment.

It's like believing that some Boston sports team can give us a level of joy and elation that we cannot capture in any other place in our lives. That they can somehow provide us the whole 9 yards worth of joy in this world. They may be able to give us three yards (and then take it away from us like the Red Sox did), but they cannot replace God.

The message this week on the 3rd Sunday of Advent is to approach the Nativity of the Lord on a need to know basis. In other words, there are some things about God that others cannot help us with. People like John the Baptist and Fr. Riley can only take us so far. They cannot bring us the full measure of exaltation and joy. There's a part of us that only God can satisfy.

The one who comes after us because he loves us will carry us the distance. He has 9 yards worth of eternity to share. And in those 9 yards worth of eternity, our question of “Who are you?” and ‘What do you have to say for yourself?’ will be answered with complete satisfaction.