

3rd SUNDAY OF ADVENT B 2008
John 1: 6-8
A man named John was sent by God.

AUTHOR WALTER BRUEGGEMANN REFERRED TO JOHN THE BAPTIST,
AS CHECKPOINT JOHN.
HE WAS REFERRING TO THE FAMOUS CROSSING IN BERLIN
CALLED CHECKPOINT CHARLIE.
IT WAS THE CROSSING POINT BETWEEN EAST AND WEST BERLIN.
BRUEGGEMANN PICTURES JOHN THE BAPTIST
AS STANDING ON THE BORDER BETWEEN
THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT,
CHECKING PASSPORTS.
HIS Demeanor IS NOT UNLIKE THOSE BORDER PATROL PEOPLE
“RUDE, DELIBERATELY INTIMIDATING,
MOSTLY SILENT AND GLARING.
THAT IS A NICE IMAGE FOR JOHN THE BAPTIST, DON’ YOU THINK?
CHECKPOINT JOHN!
AND EACH ADVENT SEASON WE ENCOUNTER
THIS ROUGH HEWN PREACHER
STANDING AT THE ENTRANCE OF ADVENT.
EACH YEAR WE HAVE TO GO THOROUGH CHECKPOINT JOHN
TO GET TO CHRISTMAS.

JOHN'S MESSAGE WAS AS STARK AS HIS APPEARANCE.

AND HIS FIRST WORD TO US IS "REPENT"

HARSH WORDS

BUT IMPORTANT WORDS.

SOMEONE HAS SAID THAT A SIGN OF INSANITY
IS TO KEEP DOING AS YOU HAVE ALWAYS DONE
AND EXPECT DIFFERENT RESULTS.

IF WE ARE GOING TO IMPROVE OUR LIFE
THEN WE WILL HAVE TO CHANGE OUR WAYS.
IN OTHER WORDS, REPENT!

BUT JOHN HAS MORE TO SAY:

JOHN'S SECOND WORD IS:

GET IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS.

AFTER HE TOLD THE PEOPLE TO REPENT

THEY ASKED "WHAT SHOULD WE DO"?

REMEMBER HIS ANSWER: THE ONE WITH TWO TUNICS

SHOULD SHARE WITH HIM WHO HAS NONE.

THE ONE WHO HAS FOOD

SHOULD DO THE SAME.

THE REPENTANCE THAT JOHN PREACHED

WAS NOT SIMPLY ABOUT OUR PERSONAL SINS.

HE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS.

EACH CHRISTMAS ARE PRAYERS ARE WITH THE PEOPLE

IN THE ARMED FORCES.

AND I AM REMINDED THAT THERE IS NO PLACE ON EARTH

WHERE GOD IS NOT AT WORK.

I REMEMBER READING ABOUT THE INCIDENT DURING THE KOREAN WAR.

COMMUNIST FORCES INVADED THE CITY OF HUNGMAN

AND BEGAN MASS EXECUTIONS OF THE PEOPLE.

OUR NAVY RESPONDED BY SENDING SHIPS TO EVACUATE THE REFUGEES.

ON **DECEMBER 22**, CAPTAIN LEONARD LaRue STEERED HIS SHIP

INTO HUNGMAN HARBOR

TO DELIVER JET FUEL.

THEY WERE IMMEDIATELY CALLED INTO SERVICE

AS A REFUGEE SHIP.

OVER 14,000 DESPERATE REFUGEES CROWDED ONTO THE SHIP.

CAPTAIN LARUE SAID A SILENT PRAYER,

LIFTED ANCHOR

AND SAILED SOUTH

INTO FREEZING WATERS AND ROUGH SEAS.

ILL- EQUIPPED HAVING LITTLE FOOD, BLANKETS, SUPPLIES, WATER

CAPTIAN LARUE THOUGHT ABOUT MARY AND JOSEPH AND JESUS

WHO ALSO HAD KNOWN HUNGER, DANGER AND COLD.

IN THE MIDST OF THESE HARDSHIPS

CAPTAIN LARUE REPORTED A CHANGE IN HIS MEN'S ATTITUDES.

THEY GAVE AWAY THEIR OWN FOOD AND CLOTHING

SEVEN BABIES WERE BORN ON THE SHIP

EACH ONE DELIVERED BY TEAMS OF UNSKILLED SAILORS.

ON CHRISTMAS DAY THEY LANDED IN SAFE HARBOR.

NOT A SINGLE LIFE HAD BEEN LOST.

FOUR YEARS LATER, CAPTAIN LAFUE LEFT THE MILITARY

TO JOIN A BENEDICTINE MONASTERY

WHERE HE SPENT THE REST OF HIS LIFE.

IN HIS JOURNALS, HE WROTE,

“THE CLEAR UNMISTAKABLE MESSAGE COMES TO ME

THAT ON THAT CHRISTMAS

IN THE COLD AND BITTER WATERS

OFF THE SHORES OF KOREA,

GOD'S HAND WAS AT THE HELM OF MY SHIP”

GOD CAN BE AT THE HELM OF OUR LIFE

WHEN WE FIRST, **REPENT**

AND SECOND, **WHEN WE GET INTO A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP**

WITH OTHERS.

THERE IS A THIRD WORD FROM JOHN.

AND JOHN'S THIRD WORD WAS HIS BEST ONE.

REPENTANCE IS GOOD AND NECESSARY,

BUT WE CAN CARRY IT ONLY SO FAR.

WE CAN NEVER,

BY OUR OWN POWER,

CORRECT ALL THE IMPERFECTIONS THAT MAKE UP OUR LIFE.

AND RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS ARE IMPORTANT

BUT THEY CANNOT ANSWER EVERYTHING.

JOHN'S THIRD WORD TO US IS: **LOOK TO JESUS.**

HE IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN FILL THE GOD-SHAPE VOID

AT THE CENTER OF EACH OF OUR SOULS.

DR. KEITH WAGNER IN SIDNEY OHIO TELLS A WONDERFUL STORY

ABOUT A MAN NAMED **JAMES PIERPONT.**

PIERPONT DIED IN 1866

AFTER LIVING WHAT MOST PEOPLE WOULD CONSIDER

A LIFE OF FAILURE.

A GRADUATE OF YALE,

A SCHOOL HIS GRAND FATHER HELP FOUND,

HE DID NOT DO WELL IN HIS FIRST TASK, A TEACHER.

HE WAS TOO EASY ON THE STUDENTS.

HE THEN TURN TO LAW,

BUT COULD NOT MAKE A GO OF IT.

HE PUBLISHED A BOOK OF HIS POEMS
BUT IT DID NOT SELL VERY WELL.
PIERPONT DECIDED TO BECOME A MINISTER,
BUT THIS DID NOT WORK OUT
HE RAN FOR GOVERNOR AND FOR CONGRESS,
BUT, OF COURSE, HE LOST.
THE CIVIL WAR CAME.
HE VOLUNTEERED AS CHAPLAIN.
TWO WEEKS LATER HE HAD TO QUIT.
THE TASK PLACED TOO MUCH OF A STRAIN ON HIS HEALTH.
THIS IS UNDERSTANDABLE, HE WAS THEN 76 YEARS OLD.
FINALLY SOMEONE FOUND HIM AN OBSCURE JOB
AND HE FINISHED OUT HIS LIFE AS A FILE CLERK.
JAMES PIERPONT ACCOMPLISHED NOTHING
HE SET OUT TO DO OR BE.
HOWEVER, IN ONE VERY IMPORTANT SENSE,
JAMES PIERPONT WAS NOT A FAILURE.
HE WROTE A SONG,
A SONG NOT ABOUT JESUS OR ANGELS OR SANTA
IT IS A SIMPLE SONG ABOUT THE JOYS OF
WHIZZING THROUGH THE SNOW IN A SLEIGH.
JAMES PIERPONT WROTE “**JINGLE BELLS**”.
WHAT IS THERE ABOUT THIS MAN THAT SPEAKS TO ME ABOUT JESUS?

JUST THIS:

JAMES PIERPONT SPENT ALL HIS LIFE WORKING TO MAKE HIS LIFE COUNT.

AND ALL HE EXPERIENCED WAS FAILURE.

AND THEN IN A BIT OF DOODLING,

HE WROTE A LITTLE CHORUS

THAT WILL BE SUNG BY MILLIONS OF PEOPLE

FOR GENERATIONS.

TO ME THIS IS A GLIMPSE OF GRACE.

YOU AND I TRY HARD TO PLEASE GOD.

BUT ALL OUR STRIVINGS ARE AS NOTHING IN GOD'S EYES.

BUT THEN WE SAY "YES" TO THE PERSON OF JESUS.

WE OPEN OUR HEARTS TO HIS LOVE – TO HIS WILL

AND SUDDENLY WITH NO EFFORT OF OUR OWN

WE MOVE FROM THE LOSING SIDE OF LIFE

TO THE WINNING SIDE,

WE MOVE FROM THE HOPELESS SIDE OF LIFE

TO THE ABUNDANT SIDE OF LIFE

WE MOVE FROM THE SHADOWS

INTO ETERNAL SUNLIGHT.

ALL THIS

WITH A SIMPLE "YES".

MAY THIS BE THE

