January 7, 2024  **DEFINING MOVEMENTS**

The gospel passage for this Sunday St. Mark 1:4-11 we read John the Baptist advises us some important things that pertain to our faith.

First is the path of faith that leads us to confession or repentance. John the Baptist's message came as a shock to those who heard it. They expected to hear the message of God's return, His vindication for His People and His Judgment against all the pagan nations. People expected to hear a message praising the people of God while at the same time condemning all the Gentile nations.

They did not expect to hear a message focusing on the need to confess one's sins and repent. They did not expect it because overall the hearts of God's people had grown lukewarm and cold over the last 400 years or so. They had come to believe that they were "righteous and holy" in the eyes of God merely because they were genetically the children of Abraham. They came to believe that they were secure with the LORD because they had suffered these last 400 years at the hands of the Greeks, the Syrians, the Romans, and other Gentile rulers.

Back in Jerusalem those who had rebuilt the Temple and had been practicing the ancient rituals knew in their hearts something was wrong, but they were too proud to admit it. They held on that as long as things were going well - attendance was up at the Temple, sacrifices were up, and more money was coming in, then all was well. High Holy Feast Days were going off without a cinch and things looked good at least on the surface. But there was no Shekinah Glory. There was no prophetic word from the LORD. The nation and its spiritual life were mere plodding along under the hands of greedy and self-serving priests and scribes.

John the Baptist does his best to wake everyone up by reminding them that before the glory of the Lord will come the nation needs to confess and repent of its sins. It needs to turn around and begin going back towards the True God of Israel - the Good God of Creation and the God of Covenant. It needs to repent of its evil, its apathy and its attempt to mix some of the world alongside its message for the sake of political and financial security. It needs to return to being a holy people set aside for the Lord God Almighty.

John the Baptist’s message is one that we need to hear today. We too are at a time when it appears that things on the surface are okay but we all sense that there is something wrong. We have more books published about how to live as a disciple of Jesus and yet as a Body of Christ we are experiencing more division, more divorce and more distorted thinking than ever.

There is a growing spirit of putting up walls instead of building bridges. There is a growing spirit of casting out those who don't think like us, live like us, or appreciate our values. There is a growing spirit of being at war with our enemies and those of other faiths. There is a spirit of anger and malice towards those who do not agree with us or join in our causes.

This is not the way of Jesus nor is it the way of His disciples. Yes, Jesus does not want us to compromise or to believe that anyone else, but He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. That is a given. That's solid. But instead of walls we must begin to build bridges of love. We need to go to war on our knees in prayer for them to see the Light and to receive Our Lord Jesus as their Savior and LORD. We need to quit worrying about being politically correct or incorrect and be people of prayer, the Word and Holiness. If you like to learn more please join us in our worship on Sunday at 11:00 AM

Happy New Year 2024!

Peace!

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