

December 10, 2023
Second Sunday in Advent
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Mark 1:1-8 (Isaiah 40:1-11; 2 Peter 3:8-14)

GOD WEARING SANDALS.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The ministry of John the Baptist was foretold by the prophets Isaiah and Malachi. (cf: Isaiah 40:3-4; Malachi 4:5) He would be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. (cf: Luke 1:15) Only St. Luke gives us a glimpse into his life between his birth and his public ministry, saying:

“... the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.” (Luke 1:80)

He was the last of the prophets to live under the Old Testament covenant, and is arguably the greatest prophet in that he announces the new era of salvation that comes in Christ Jesus. But he wouldn’t want to hear any accolades. He came to be a subordinate.

“... he preached, saying, ‘After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.’” (Mark 1:7)

Tying and untying the master’s shoes were among the lowliest tasks performed by slaves and servants, yet the last and greatest of the Old Testament prophets recognized glory of the One for whom he prepared the way. John knew that he wasn’t worthy to even be Jesus’ slave and untie His sandals. And the reason? They were God’s sandals. Who is worthy to touch the sandals of God?

John was preparing the way for the incarnate Jesus. The word ***incarnation*** is the fancy theological word we confess in the Nicene Creed that means God took on human flesh and became fully man, yet still fully God. A simpler way of saying it is – God put on the flesh and bone of man, put on sandals, and walked miles upon miles on His journey to Jerusalem and Calvary’s cross where He would establish comfort and restoration for all mankind by being nailed to the cross, suffering and dying, so that sinners such as you and me might be granted forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation.

It’s the same comfort that God announced to Israel in our Old Testament text:

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.” (Isaiah 40:1)

The God Lord promised comfort and restoration for the Babylonian exiles, and these promises are also fulfilled through John the Baptist’s ministry, and have personal consequences for you and for all people. Just as the Lord doubled the comfort and forgiveness for the exiles, He has doubled comfort and forgiveness for you in the person of His Son, Christ Jesus.

But unfortunately you and I discard the comfort of God in exchange for the comfort of our sin. Rather than using your time, talents, and your treasures for the glory of God's Kingdom, you find it more comfortable to use them for your own purposes. Rather than be comforted by the curb, mirror, and the guide of God's Law, you find it more comfortable to pretend that God's Law no longer applies to you. Rather than be comforted by God's gifts in Word and Sacrament, you find it more comfortable embracing the distractions and pleasures of the world.

Jesus could've remained comfortable in heaven instead of coming to win comfort, restoration, and salvation for mankind, but in His love, He stooped down and allowed His hands and feet be nailed to the cross as the suffering Servant, suffering and dying to serve you. (cf: Isaiah 52:13–53:12) When you suffer, take comfort in knowing that God, in the flesh, has suffered greater than all. He has scars to go along with His sandals. The incarnate Jesus came in a body just like yours. And His humiliation was made complete through His suffering. His suffering is more important to you than your own.

And when you struggle with temptation, please know that it was in a body like yours that Jesus was tempted in all the temptations that you have experienced. And His resisting temptation is more important than that of your own. In your contrition and repentance, He forgives you all your sins, including the sin of discarding the comfort of God in exchange for the comfort of your own desires.

Fellow redeemed, nothing is more comforting than to get up in the morning knowing that Jesus came in the world to reconcile you with the Father, making peace between God and you. It's comforting to know that He is always there to hear your prayers. It's comforting to know that He:

“... is at the right hand of God, ... interceding for [you].” (Romans 8:34)

It's comforting to know that:

“... [you] have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation for [y]our sins, and not for [y]ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:1–2)

It's comforting to know that He has not left you as an orphan but will come again to take you home to live with Him eternally in heaven. (cf: John 14:1–21)

John the Baptist was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, but he knew that Jesus was far mightier than he. John knew exactly what Isaiah meant when he foretold:

“¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.” (Isaiah 40:10)

John knew that Jesus was coming in Law and Gospel... coming in judgement and salvation... coming to punish the wicked but pouring out grace upon grace on the faithful. Jesus is God wearing sandals, walking miles upon miles while keeping God's Law perfectly in your stead... carrying your sin, your griefs, and your burdens to the cross. God wore a crown of thorns, a purple robe, and sandals as Pontius Pilate presented Him to the crowds, unwittingly and correctly announcing:

“Behold the man!” (John 19:5)

God incarnate, walking mighty in sandals, walking humbly into your death so that you might live. He poured out His innocent blood so that His blood might wash away your sin. He arose from the dead as man, bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh – and still true God.

John preached:

“He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:8)

Just like you witness with little Vincent earlier, when you were baptized:

“[Jesus] saved [you], . . . by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on [you] richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace [you] might become [an heir] according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:5–7)

As a regenerated child of God, you are a new creation. (cf: 2 Corinthians 5:17) By the power of the Holy Spirit, you are now able to use your gifts for the glory of God’s Kingdom. You no longer need to live as an enemy of God but can delight in the Law of the Lord. (cf: Romans 7:22; James 4:4) You can joyfully gather to receive God’s priceless gifts – even when it’s uncomfortable. Our Lord is coming again soon, and He has given you the tools to be prepared for His arrival by bearing fruits of repentance and living godly life in word and deed until His return.

The one who came after John is mightier than John, and mightier than you and me. Jesus’ human life is mightier than the record of your past, and His crucifixion is mightier than all your sins. His resurrection is mightier than your sin, death, and the devil. When you see Jesus hanging on the cross, remember Isaiah’s words:

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.... [your] warfare is ended... [your] iniquity is pardoned, [and you have]... received from the Lord’s hand double... [the forgiveness] for all [your] sins.” (Isaiah 40:1-2)

You deserve none of it – but in His rich mercy, God pours out a double portion for the sake of His Son Jesus. He pours it out in the preaching of His Word, His word of absolution, in the remembrance of your Baptism, and in His body and blood in His Holy Supper. Christ Jesus is coming again – soon. It seems like a long wait but:

“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

Until His return, He is your comfort:

“He will tend his flock like a shepherd...”

and when He returns:

“... he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom...”
(Isaiah 40:11)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.