

Advent A-2, 2010
December 5, 2010
Matthew 3:1-12
Title: Get With The Program

Grace to you from God our father and from the Lord Jesus Christ who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Here are some numbers..

35 Billion

1 Billion

10 million

340,000

1,000

Any idea what those are?

35 billion—the amount Americans will likely spend on Christmas this year

1 Billion—the number of people on this planet who live on less than 1 dollar a day

10 million—the number of children who will die this year—disease or war

340,000—the number of churches on American soil

1,000—members of this part of Christ's body

When I was a boy among the dark characters on Championship Wrestling out of Charlotte was the Great Bolo. Bolo seemed to always win, but unfairly. He wore this imposing mask and when he got his undeserving opponent in a grip from under the mask Bolo would take a small piece of metal and rub it on the temple of this other wrestler---and what would happen, he'd fall asleep.

Lying limp on the mat this helpless, slumbering wrestler just lay there and the Great Bolo would pounce and pin this poor person.

Have you ever been put in a sleeper hold?

Some of those numbers are so staggering---1 billion people
With not enough to live on

The sheer volume of Christmas spending—I heard yesterday about \$600 per person this year....300 million people

Isn't it just better to put it out of your mind---kind of go to sleep...hibernate...

Some things are just too staggering

Some things are so weighty they make our eye lids heavy and our souls live on sleeping pills...

--you've tried your best to reach a teenager and every effort brings only a deepening chasm

--you've tried to chance an unhealthy pattern of living only to take one step forward and two backwards

--your at mid-career and all that's ahead is a ceiling that won't allow you through

--you've deferred your dreams for so long they've become only something you shrug your shoulders over---a sleeper hold?

Isaiah spoke of his people as a stump....cut off...no future..

Stumps are for sitting on....for counting rings....for longing for the past, for what was.

340,000 churches---340,000 stumps

1000 stumps at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

And within each of us there are quite a few stumps—

Here's one of mine---I battle with it regularly---since coming back from Zimbabwe in April---it's the pervasive sense of hopelessness

--the cycle of poverty and disease there is so pervasive...can

Meaningful change really come there...lemon trees bearing fruit many times a year and those lemons just left to rot—no roads, no vehicles, no way out....a stump, a desire to just give in and give up.

John the Baptizer comes to prepare us for Jesus

The operative word for this grass-hopper, wild honey eating

Camel clothed prophet is REPENT.

Repent---wake up

Turn away from what diminishes for something deeper and truer

John puts an elbow into our conscience

Live in the promise of God's gripping newness, precisely where you are holding on to a rotting lemon.

All the people come out to John even the Pharisees and Sadducees—who are religious opponents—John demands of them a new beginning---their ways are sleep inducing, not life inducing.

Bear fruit worthy of repentance

God can take a stone and bring from it life

Whatever your perception of repentance----it's about turning toward God's newness

Which is why John humbly points to Jesus---the one whose sandals I'm not worthy to carry....the kingdom come near.

Does it matter to a sleeping, stumpy, stony world that Jesus is coming near? What if what we have heard, seen and experienced in Jesus is to be relied upon more than all else we have experienced

Jesus comes to a stony man and calls him to start over

Jesus comes to a hungry people underwhelmed by their stumpy

Resources and demands they look anew at what he can

Do with their bread

Jesus comes to a stinking, sleeping Lazarus and calls him from death. What if what we have heard, seen and experienced in Jesus is to be relied upon more than all else we have experienced.

It is incumbent on us to believe that whatever those powers

That bring death, warfare, suffering the stumping of this life

Jesus will burn with unquenchable fire. John baptizes with water, Jesus with the Holy Spirit—the spirit of his newness, love and life.

And so Advent is a time to yearn big and bold because of what we know about Jesus.

340,000 churches just in America. That's 155 million Christians. What if we ramped up our living out Jesus' urging that we love our neighbors as ourselves.

1,000 souls through Good Shepherd Lutheran Church....

Someone last week said in my hearing we could give \$100,000 to Mnene---sounds like Jesus taking the loaves and fishes

I was at campus ministry worship at Holy Trinity in Chapel Hill and beginning my sermon. For the benefit of all the students there I mentioned the names of our Good Shepherd students—Laura Buff, Lindsey Lewis..and Michael Dickson...Michael wasn't there. After I said that one of Michael's friends texted Michael the following message

Michael—your pastor just called you out!

Michael showed up just as I completed my message.

John the Baptist act calls us out ...out of our sleepy, stony, stumpy ways...not to put us down, but to prepare us,
So that we will show up to come before the Lord of life, Jesus...

Who seeks only to draw us to the fullness of life, to bring us
Along ...so that we will get with the program!

35 billion spent on Christmas

1 billion living on less than 365 dollars per year

10 million children dying needlessly per year

340,000 churches in America

1,000 souls for Christ through Good Shepherd

Lots of numbers.

One number alone holds sway...that number is the one Lord Jesus Christ.

Come, Lord Jesus, come!!