

Our Kind of Crazy
December 4, 2016
Matthew 3:1-12

It's "Crazy John" Sunday at churches around the world. Every Second Sunday of Advent, the wild man of the wilderness invades our imaginations. He's wrapped in cowhides and spouting judgment. He's a walking advertisement for the bugs and honey diet. He quotes prophecy and dunks respectable people to wash away their sins.

John may be crazy. But he's our kind of crazy.

He makes these confusing connections. Fruit from stones. Fire from water. John may be crazy. But he's a prophet. He points to the new way things will work.

The Messiah comes from a manger. The King comes from a cross. Life comes from the grave. New birth comes from old death. This is the new order John announces. This is the new reality Jesus launches. This is the New Creation the Spirit empowers.

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John made sense to the people of Jerusalem and all Judea. They left their warm homes and cozy tables. They tramped into the wilderness to hear a simple message. God is about to change everything. We can come along, if we're not too wedded to the old ways.

How does this speak to you? Fruit from stones. Fire from water. And to throw in John's mentor, Isaiah—shoots from a dead stump.

Perhaps your stone-cold heart is stirring. Maybe there are new shoots from the dead stump of disappointment and despair. The flat water of a bored spirit may start to bubble and boil.

Is this the season for you when everything changes?

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He starts with forgiveness. The French say that to forgive is first of all to accuse. "Repent!" John proclaims. So they come—addicts and adulterers, molesters and murderers, pickpockets and pranksters, thieves large and small. They come to come clean.

Their sin is a two-sided coin. On the one side is idolatry. Any god will do, as long as that god serves my desires. On the other side is despair. No god worth the name wants anything to do with me. Idolatry and despair—it is the coin of Satan's realm. We spend that spiritual funny money to drive away death. We discover that Satan's coins are all counterfeit.

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John starts with forgiveness. So some things have got to go. Hatred, pride, anger, greed, lust, vengeance, apathy—all the things that come between us and God, between us and our neighbor. Burned like chaff and blown to the winds.

John starts with forgiveness. So some things must stay. Grace, mercy, peace, hope, compassion—all the things that open me to trust God above all things. John points to the One who brings these gifts to us—Jesus the Messiah, baptizing us with the Holy Spirit and fire.

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Which image speaks to you today?

Is this a season of growth and giving, a time when the Spirit bursts into bloom for you?

Is this a cold, hard time—the moment when the Spirit raises you from the rocks to be a renewed child of God?

Is this a season when your faith burns bright and hot for all to see?

Is it a moment for drowning—when all that tries to kill you must die in the waters of repentance?

Is this a season for cutting of the old, dead wood that weighs you down?

Or is it a moment when new life springs out of that dead wood?

What image speaks to you today?

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John preaches in expectation. We live in fulfillment. The Messiah *has* come from a manger. The King *has* come from a cross. Life *has* come from the grace. New birth arises from death and despair.

We are not prophets of what might be. We are priests of what God has done in Jesus. We are kings and queens filled with the Holy Spirit of hope.

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Thanks be to God!

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