

Had I been part of the crowd
on the Jordan banks on that very day
I would have probably been sorely disappointed by the prophet.
Not only because I don't like it to be called names
- although it may not be as bad as it sounds -
By calling the crowd *brood of vipers*
There is a great deal of chances that John isn't referring to all the
bad stuff we usually associate with snakes:
hypocrisy, wickedness
It's more of a pastoral reference (not in the religious sense!)
At the end of the summer when peasants would
burn their stubble in the fields
it would make the snakes nesting in it
very afraid
and the poor animals would just come out in a hurry, fleeing for their own lives.

The Rev. Fanny Belanger
Sunday, December 13
3rd Sunday of Advent
Luke 3: 7-18

So when John calls the crowd
Brood of vipers
it's less about being deceitful and ugly
than it is about
Rats running from the ship
Which is not very nice either.

Well, John was not very nice anyway, neither was he very quiet.
He said what he had to say to
whomever
he had to say it.
We miss the end of the chapter in our reading today
but actually John is going to be very soon
arrested and put to death
just because he could not help telling the truth
to Herod about his behavior
sleeping with his own brother's wife.

This is who John was and that is the also reason why
I would have been so disappointed by him.
Let me explain: I can only imagine the crowds
walking for hours in the dryness and heat of the
wilderness
full of expectation - as time of expectation are -
a mixed of dread and wonder.
The crowds both afraid and hopeful waiting
for a revelation from God
in the midst of their own turmoil
waiting to see a sign, to meet the great man
- who knows maybe was he the Messiah -
And yet, yet it seems now that all he had to say to them was:

Go back to your life
Do well
Be of good heart.

When I was in high school and got
all worked up by a huge problem like
a math exam, a fight with my sister, or a heartbreak
I sometimes felt so desperate for a bit of advice.
And I remember my mother would tell me something like:
Do what you can
Do your best
It drove me crazy.
Of course, what I was gonna do
except doing what I could?
And what was my best anyway?
I was sorely disappointed with adult wisdom.
Really was I thinking,
is it all they have to offer to get us through life?

Well, this is the same kind of feeling
I guess I would have had on the
banks of the Jordan on that very day.
Because John the Baptist - I always have had in mind this image of a man
on fire with God's love
Living this wild life of a wandering preacher
half naked and almost dying of hunger
when he could have thrived in the Temple
wearing fine garments and eating up the meat of the sacrifices
living happy ever afters
as the priest he was called to be by the blood of his tribe
But John the Baptist decided to live this crazy life
of prayer and privation
and so you would expect him to be a fountain of wisdom right?
And yet when you expose your problem, he would say to you:
Well, what are you gonna do?
Go back to your life
Share with others, be nice, don't bully and do your best.

Sounds a little like high-school advices, right?

And yet.
Yet if you think about it, who were these people coming to him?
A brood of vipers
Certainly not the fine and the educated
the white bread society
They were poor fools like him
sinners, tax collectors, soldiers
– don't get it wrong not of the military but mercenaries -
And so I guess John talks to them
as you would talk to children.
When you are fifteen or seventeen and you have so little
knowledge and light about what life is all about
what are you going to do except: *do what you can and do your best* as my mother used to say.
And when I think about it I realize it was probably her way to say:
It's going to be okay

And if you think about it
it makes a difference when
you do not know what to do
To remain faithful and true.
When you're a child to
show up for exams and to show up for your friends
keep yourself out of troubles and try to be the best person you can be
You have such a small place in the universe
you're not going to change the world
but maybe
you're building up a worthy person that will eventually make a difference, someday.

Well, in Advent we are in this time of waiting and waking
building up and growing up
Not knowing yet what we will be called to be or to do.
- The Messiah has not shown up yet.
It's true when you're a child but it's also true at
many times of our lives,
sometimes we just
don't know what we are supposed to do
and so it's a frustrating and yet it is a good wisdom to
Keep doing what you do and do it right
Do it with all your heart
Bear good fruits and be faithful.

It's a time of purification – a baptism of water
Our life may fill empty
we feel
ready to act and ready to jump in and it's just
very lonely
It can be a time of unemployment, of raising a child, a disease
- Growing old is a huge time of purification -
Empty times seem pointless
And yet it matters, it matters a lot if we do it well
as John puts it today.

But we have to remember that
it does not matter because it would be the thing in itself
it matters because it helps us get ready for something else, or for somebody.
The baptism of water has no sense without
a baptism of fire.
If you read the Gospel, at some point Matthew the tax collector
will leave his office
Paul the persecutor will fall down on his knees.
Do what you can
Do what you think is best
is not a life program.
It is just what we need to do to
be ready.
Who knows what God can do with a single person
who lives his life with integrity?

If you haven't been yet, I highly recommend to you
To go and see the movie *Spotlight*
Where a few journalists from the Boston Globe
- just because they do their job properly -
will uncover the lies of hundreds in cases of child abuse
and maybe save the church
from its own sins.

In this life, it's often that
we don't see where is God
as it wasn't obvious for the people in Palestine -
although they could tell something was coming.
But if we cannot see God, God can see us
And if we cannot find God, God can find us
And we will receive our baptism of fire
when comes the time.
We will be filled with the Holy Spirit to go and do
what each one of us needs to do and only can do.
Christian life shouldn't be an excuse to be
a nice little person
happy with business as it is,
doing the best she can and so – not getting a lot done actually, or worst
just doing what she is told to do without giving it a second thought.

Living faithfully the everyday life
is about opening our eyes our ears and our hearts
for the one who is coming.
We can know for sure that at some point in our lives
we will be asked to do something.
As we need water and fire, summer and winter
there are in our lives
times to be filled with the Holy Spirit and times to wait, to question and to hope.

One thing remains though:
holiness is always at hand.
Holiness is not about being this great person
we all in a sense would like to be
Holiness is this life of service
for Christ and for whomever come to us.
I like it about John that all is holiness is not in the fact that
he wears camel hair or eat locust and honey or whatever.
His holiness is in his deep conviction about
Christ's own holiness
Unworthy as he proclaims to be to untie the thong of his sandals
- the work of a slave.
In everything we do we can do it for the glory of God.
It does not depend on us, it depends on Him
And this is why as Luke puts it
Even being called a *Brood of vipers*
is good news after all
Because as tough as it is, if we remain faithful we are called to believe that it's gonna be okay. Amen.