

Second Sunday in Advent
December 9, 2018

Text: Luke 3:1-14
Theme: “Enabled”

Enable is not a bad word, normally quite positive. But it can involve enabling for something that is not good. This is helping someone engage in an activity that is harmful to self and to others. The enabler doing this is thinking he is providing for a need. Yet such providing enables one to continue in a behavior that is bad without facing the full consequences. Such enablers may need help in facing up to their enabling

That type of enabling is not really the topic of our message. We are considering enabling for doing the good, what is good and desirable and beneficial. It’s what we are praying for in our Collect for this Second Sunday in Advent; *Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.* Such enabling is for what is God pleasing.

John the Baptist was such an enabler. John is pretty direct. He doesn’t pull any punches. His message that enabled began by revealing inability, brokenness. He pointed to the One who could fix and enable. We know the expression, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” John preached, ‘You are broke, and you can’t fix it. It doesn’t look good for you. But then the salvation of God.’

When something is broke it is no longer functioning as designed. I'll illustrate with one of our old speakers. Remember we had a buzzing sound, not pleasant. So when you take a look inside you see this empty box. That's because I have taken out the speakers, all four of them. We have the tweeter, the mid-range, and these two woofers or sub-woofers. The problem was with these big boys. The flexible material around the outside, the surround had deteriorated over the years allowing the cone to vibrate in ways that were not pleasant. The smaller ones having a different material are just fine. So the whole speaker assembly was broke, still worked, but not according to design.

That could be a description of all creation, broken, still works but not according to design, God's design. It can describe us. John was doing such describing down by the Jordan River. He was pumping out his preaching in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar, that time when Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod, Philip, and Lysanias were about their tetrarching, John was causing quite a stir. Those stirred went out stirred the surrounding countryside with news of the man stirring. It was all like a ripple effect. More went out to hear this voice in the wilderness, all sorts of people, the good and the bad, the powerful and the weak.

John was proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins back in those days at that time. But it was not just any time, it was time, time for the voice spoken of by God through Isaiah. That voice cried to prepare, get ready, open up the road so He can come in. That road, that

way to the heart was repentance. Many hearts were stirred. It was all a happening like no one had ever seen happen before.

John was stirring up the normal. And those in charge of the normal, or so they supposed, wanted to know what was going on. What was up with all this? Who did this man think he was? Maybe he ought not be doing such stirring. He was hitting close to home, too close? “Repent!” “But John, surely you are not talking to me?”

It was (is) easy to fall into such thinking. Remember Abraham, Father Abraham had many sons, and we are definitely some of them, so why not praise the Lord right along with us instead of calling us to repentance. We have quite a pedigree you know. We can still fall into that thinking. ‘I’ve been a part of this church for years and years. My family is steeply rooted in Lutheranism. There have even been some pastors in my family.’ ‘So yes, let’s just praise the Lord maybe for me.’

‘Broken is pretty hard word. We have some pretty nice features compared to others. We are serious about keeping the law. We strive to understand all the peaks and valleys through the tradition of the fathers. We are not like those thieving tax collectors or those ruffian soldiers, or even most of the common people coming out to hear.’ ‘I have traveled pretty far down the faith road. I have my spiritual routines. I try to keep my spiritual nose clean. I pray. I’ve come to worship, and I give quite a lot actually. So broken is a pretty hard word. Maybe bent or even a bit battered, but broken?’

And John says yes, you, broken. Producing a child of Abraham is not such a feat for God. He could have done it differently. He could produce such children from these stones. Giving thanks for the faithful fathers and appreciating the teachings coming down from them is not the same as putting faith in the fruits of those who came before you or patting yourself on the back for being their children.

John says, ‘snakes, more like snakes.’ “You brood of vipers,” (v 7) Now a nest of rattlesnakes is not a very desirable figure. ‘Why are you coming down here? “Who told you about the coming wrath?” ‘Was it that everyone else was coming and you just thought you would come to satisfy your curiosity?’ ‘And then you came and were amazed at all folks who needed a good scrubbing.’

Broken, the whole lot of you. This includes the obvious ones, the tax collectors, the prostitutes, and the soldiers. It includes the powerful ones, like Herod. He was not there in person to hear, but he did hear what John was proclaiming, heard that it was not lawful that he should have his brother’s wife. Broken, that includes a good looking teacher of the law you. You are good at details, the details of the fathers. You do stand out in crowd, a big presence, sometimes made bigger by your long prayers, and big phylacteries. But how good are you when it comes to sharing tunics and food? The fruit of your faith, where is it?

So it was with then, how is it now? Is it like this speaker? This one looks a whole lot like this other one. It was in the speaker cabinet with the other three. But if you take a closer look at this one it has not magnet, no

electrical leads. It was a speaker than never produce a sound, a phonographic phony, just looks, no fruit.

“Broken,” that was a big part of John’s message. And John did include himself. Prepare the way, open your heart in repentance and the Coming One will flood with forgiveness. He comes. There is no stopping Him. No valley will be too deep, no mountain too high, no path too windy or too rough. Who can stand the day of that coming?

John proclaimed, the law still proclaims, “broken,” and sinner cut to heart cries out, “Yes, broken, me, a sinner.” Many went down into the water confessing their sins. “Lord, be merciful to me a sinner. Lord, I daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment.”

And the Lord is merciful. The Lord has come, the fully able Lord. John spoke of the coming judgment. Again, he said the ax was at the roots of the unfruitful tree, the phony phonograph. It would be cut down and cast into the fire. Later in verse 17 he speaks of the Coming One being on the threshing floor to separate wheat from chaff, in the storehouse for the wheat, but the fire, the unquenchable fire, for the chaff. So it would be with the mightier One whose sandals John was not fit to untie, the baptizing with the Holy Spirit and fire.

And He comes, comes right down to the water insisting on being baptized by John overcoming John’s objections. This One is fully able to raise up children of Abraham from stones and to turn children of Abraham to stone. Yet He does not come in a display of power but as a servant to

stand in the place of sinners. So yes, He is baptized by John, baptized for John and for you and me and for all.

Yes, all along He is fully able and a little of that ability is displayed along the way as the blind now see, the deaf now hear, the lame now leap, and even the dead are raised. But there will also be a great display, maybe greater of that power not used. He would be handed over, crucified, dead and buried. We should be the tree chopped down for our sin, but instead He endures the tree of the cross as He is made sin for us. It is sad news, but also such good news. This is Christ for us! He is dead and buried but then His power is shown over death by His resurrection. He laid down His life but then took it up again.

“Stir up our hearts, O Lord.” Our hearts are stirred in repentance, daily. The road is open for the forgiveness of the Lord to flow in. Our hearts respond in joy, gratitude and praise! Our Lord continues to come and our hearts are open to receive His forgiveness and His direction. “Stir up our hearts, O Lord...that by His coming we may be able to serve You with pure minds.”

Our Lord enables, but what do the lives of those enabled look like? That is what the crowd was asking. That is what the tax collectors and soldiers were asking. John said it looked like sharing what the Lord has given you for the needs of others. It looked like serving with honesty and compassion instead of thievery and thuggery. Broken you and me are restored, made new in Christ. Through His coming then, knowing He

comes now, and looking forward to His coming again we are enabled to serve with pure minds. We are the real deal, not the silent speaker.

We are stirred by our Lord's coming to us in His Word, in baptism, and in the Lord's Supper. We remember and take heart in serving in Paul's words from our epistle lesson, "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of our Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:6)
For Jesus' sake. Amen