

Second Sunday of Advent, sjb, 15

What we have in today's gospel is a paradigm shift. A paradigm is a way of looking at reality. A paradigm shift is when that view of reality falls apart or becomes drastically altered.

An example of a paradigm shift would be when people realized that the earth was not the center of the universe, but that it revolved around the sun— certainly that was a huge shift in perspective which rocked the world of folks some hundreds of years ago.

And then for us Americans, 9-11 was a horrible example of a paradigm shift as we discovered that we are not as safe from terrorism as we once thought that we were.

But historically speaking, Jesus' entry into our world is without a doubt **the paradigm shift of all times!**

Just about everything we ever believed about life & about God radically changed; in fact, Jesus was so different from what anyone was expecting that while in prison, even John the Baptist sent messengers to Jesus asking if he is the One or should they look for another?

2. Perhaps we should see our lives as just the beginning of God's new work in us, as a result of the paradigm shift that Jesus introduced to us?

Take that one step further and ask if every day might possibly be the beginning of some wonderful new chapter only your life and mine could write?

Well then, how are we to prepare for this new way of relating to God?

Certainly John the Baptist's message was as direct & disconcertingly simple as it was challenging:

He stated that he was here to pave the way for Jesus by making our paths straight.

He did this by calling us to repentance.

A repentance that was symbolized by baptism.

John calls on those who hear him to receive a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin.

But do we really want to repent, repent all the way as John would have us do?

Billy Graham stated that our repentance must mean more than the little girl who prayed:

Make me good—not real good, but just good enough so that I won't get whipped.

I do wonder if we sometimes put similar conditions upon our own repentance; if so, then we're not serious about wanting a more intense relationship with our God.

Now if repentance could be described in one word, it would be "renounce," but renounce what?

Again, the answer is given in only one word: sin and sin is, biblically speaking, missing the mark & so we are to renounce those things about our lives that keep us missing the mark.

However for a serious conversion of heart, we must create a spirit of receptivity to change as when we recognize a need to realign our lives in order to fulfill our purpose for being here on earth in the first place.

After all, even secular thinkers recognize this need for an evaluation of their life's path.

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And since all life involves movement, it is easy to recognize that when we move or when our goals move we will sometimes find ourselves uncertain as what we are to do.

And when that happens, think of the gps navigational equipment used in cars, airliners & ocean-going vessels—those vehicles that employ gps technology generally arrive at their destination, but, at any given moment along the route, they are likely to be off course.

In response to any errors, the navigational system must continuously realign itself so that the vessel ends up at its intended destination.

For us humans, our lives are never static and change is inevitable. Moreover, in our daily journey through this world, we make small and sometimes significant choices.

Some of those choices move us towards God and some of them move us away from God, as when we miss the mark and sin.

As a result realignment, or what we Christians call repentance, occurs when we recognize that we have gotten off course in our lives and we recognize the need to re-direct our lives towards Jesus outstretched arms.

In John the Baptist's day, John called his contemporaries to a radical return to God that included a tangible public witness of this return in the form of baptism.

Baptism serves as an initiation into the ways of the Lord, but it is also a public witness to others of our intention to turn away from our old way of life and realign our lives with the good news that Jesus is offering us.

So where does that leave us? For starters, it brings us once again to the place of new beginnings. No matter what happened yesterday or last month or two years ago, God longs to create a new beginning in our lives.

If that were to happen, the season of Advent, rich as it is with new beginnings, might become the very season of change itself.

Advent challenges us to a new beginning if we dare to ask ourselves if we have fully entered into our own baptism--not just into the literal waters, but into the deeper meaning of baptism.

Have we accepted baptism as our acceptance into God's family?  
In other words: have we accepted our own acceptance?

Have we honestly accepted this paradigm shift and given ourselves to the God who entered our world so that we can become the people he begs us to be?

And so today, our text invites us to take a good, hard look at ourselves and, if necessary, to realign our spiritual gps so that our lives are a continuous path towards God.

If Jesus is someone who is already part of our daily lives, then give thanks and continue to remain open to his work in your lives by being receptive to the ongoing need for realignment.

But if you find yourself unsure about what a relationship with Jesus even means, then recall that Jesus' love for you will pierce the darkness of your own confusion.

This same God who sent John to challenge his contemporaries to give up their sinful ways is calling out to us today with the good news of Jesus' offer of salvation



In the old days, when there was an exciting news event, added newspapers would be printed and vendors would go about yelling “Extra, extra, read all about it!” Our faith is founded on the good news of Jesus’ love for each and every one of us.

After all, Christianity did not come into the world through the editorial page; it came to the world as breaking news. Something monumental has happened: The Word became flesh and dwelt his tent among us and this gospel truth was first preached as big news; front page, stop the presses news!

Wherever this message is preached with power, it has been preached as news; wherever it has dwindled down to mere advice with an editorial flavor, it has evaporated into a cloud as vague as fog.

But there’s both power and joy in this good news. Pope John Paul I once wrote that the strength to see the good side of things should be characteristic of all Christians.

Consequently, full acceptance of the meaning of our baptism is meant to be the significant, joyful paradigm shift in our lives.

Advent is the time put aside by the church for me to examine my own personal global positioning system...& to ask myself the question: if acceptance of my own baptism has not rocked my world, then why hasn’t it?