

## **We Are the Voice of Love**

*December 14, 2008*

(Advent 3 - Year B)

John 1: 6-8, 19-28

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

At a few parties I have been to, there is this game that I have played before.

This game is designed to be an ice-breaker, to mix people up and to get to know each other better.

This ice-breaker game works like this:

You walk into a party and a name tag is stuck onto your back.

However, the name on this name tag is not your name, but it is the name of some famous person.

For example, the name tag on your back might say that you are Ronald Reagan or Barbara Walters or even a fictional character such as Donald Duck.

Then, you walk around the room and you introduce yourself to people whom you do not know.

And then you ask them to look at the name tag on your back - and then you ask them questions so that you can figure out your hidden identity.

You ask a person a question like:

“Am I in politics?”

And then the other person says:

“No, you are not in politics.”

Then, you go up to the next person and ask them another question to gain a clue about your identity.

“Am I a movie star?”

And then the other person says:

“No, you are not a movie star.”

Then on to the next person:

“Am I a cartoon character?”

“No, you are not a cartoon character.”

And the game goes on and on until you can finally figure out who it is

that you really are.

In today's Gospel reading from John, it seems that the religious authorities are playing the same kind of ice-breaker game with John the Baptist.

The priests and the Levites come from Jerusalem to John the Baptist and ask him:

“Who *are* you?”

Then, the game to figure out John's identity begins.

The religious leaders ask John the Baptist:

“Are you the Messiah, the anointed one?”

And then John answers:

“No, I am not the Messiah.”

Then the religious leaders ask John:

“Are you Elijah, the prophet who wears leather?”

And John answers:

“No, I am not Elijah.”

Then the religious leaders ask John:

“Are you the great prophet that Moses promised would come?”

And John answers:

“No, I am not that great prophet.”

Finally, frustrated at not getting a positive answer, the religious leaders ask John the Baptist again:

Well, then - who are you?”

Then John gives away the answer to this identity game, proclaiming:

“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness.

Prepare the way of the Lord.”

You see, John the Baptist knows who he is not.

John is not the Messiah, the anointed one.

He is not Elijah or Ronald Reagan or even the great prophet promised by Moses.

John the Baptist is clear about who he is.

John the Baptist is the voice:

The voice of one crying out in the wilderness.

As Christians, we must be clear about who we are and who we are not.  
As Christians, we wear a name tag on our back that tells us our identity.  
And we can ask others for clues:

Are we the Messiah? No.

Are we the prophet that Moses promised? No.

Instead, we are the voice of one crying out in the wilderness.

We are the voice who prepares the way of the Lord.

Three years ago, a group of pastors got together and talked about the  
voices that they hear,

Especially the voices that our culture uses to speak about Christmas.

And these pastors did not like the voices that they heard.

The voices of Christmas that these pastors heard sounded like cash  
registers and muzak in elevators and department store clerks telling  
us “Merry Christmas” while we sign our life away into a  
bottomless chasm of credit card debt.

So, these pastors got together to form a new movement, a movement  
called the Advent Conspiracy.

You can find out more about the Advent Conspiracy on their website:  
[www.adventconspiracy.org](http://www.adventconspiracy.org)

The Advent Conspiracy is designed to be a voice - a voice that reclaims  
the message of Advent.

Chris Seay of Ecclesia Church in Houston and also one of the founders  
of the Advent Conspiracy has said:

“We (Christians) are upset because Christmas has lost its meaning,  
But then we get angry because they’re saying ‘Happy Holidays’ at Best  
Buy and Circuit City and we want them to say ‘Merry Christmas.’

My response is just the opposite.

[Because] Best Buy and Circuit City do not represent what Christmas is  
about.”

Another founder of the Advent Conspiracy says:

“Christmas is *not* the mall’s story.

[Christmas] is *our* story and we haven't told it very well."

As a renewed voice for the season of Advent, the Advent Conspiracy proclaims 4 principles:

1. Worship Fully
2. Spend Less
3. Give More
4. Love All.

Last Sunday, in my sermon, I preached about the first principle of this Advent Conspiracy:

To worship fully.

I invited us to focus our Advent on the worship of Jesus, the Word made flesh, by being in church on each of the Sundays of Advent and on Christmas Eve.

Yet, the voices in the Advent Conspiracy also ask us to focus on spending less on gifts and on giving more to others.

They also ask us to focus on accomplishing the attainable goal of making clean water available to all in this world.

Because - did you know that Americans spend 450 billion dollars a year on Christmas?

But estimates show that it would only take 10 billion dollars to make clean water available to everyone in the world.

For just a fraction of the cost that we spend on Christmas, the many people who are struggling without the basic necessity of clean water can have that need met.

In the past two years, hundreds of churches participating in the Advent Conspiracy have used their voice -

And have raised over 3.5 million dollars for global projects, including clean water projects.

We are not the Messiah or Elijah.

But, we can be clear about who we are.

We are the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

We are the voice that can make a difference in this world.

And it is *our* responsibility to be the voice of the real Christmas story of

love, and sacrifice and service,  
Rather than to allow Dillard's and Wal-Mart to tell our story.

For, we must not allow others to tell us who we are.  
We are *not* the consumers and purchasers and portfolio managers of  
Christmas.

We are the voice of one crying out in the Advent wilderness - to prepare  
the way of the Lord.

So, use your voice - and put gifts to charities and churches on your gift  
list, rather than gifts from Circuit City.

Use your voice - to encourage everyone to worship fully.

Use your voice - to love someone who is lonely or sick or grieving.

For, the Christmas authorities have come into our Advent party with a  
little ice-breaker game.

Along with John the Baptist, the authorities want to know:

Who are you?

“Are you the purchasers who will deliver us from this economic  
recession?”

And our answer is: “No.”

“Are you the kind of Christians who celebrate Christmas only as a  
family holiday, without ever worshiping with your church family?”

And our answer is: “No.”

Then the Christmas authorities will ask us:

“Well then, who are you?”

And our answer is clear:

We are the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

We are the voice...of love.

AMEN.