

Point to Jesus

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Benjamin is going through a phase right now where he will correct John and me if we call him a nickname. For example, if I call him honey, he'll turn around and tell me, I'm not honey, I'm Benjamin. He is quick to remind us who he isn't.

In our gospel reading for today, John does a similar thing. He defines who he is by telling those questioning him who he is not. He is not the messiah. He is not a prophet. Rather, John is sent to prepare the way of the Lord.

When the priests and Levites questioned John, he didn't fall into their trap. It seemed that the answers the leaders were looking for needed to fit into a box. The

leaders wanted to put John in a specific category ~ such as a prophet or the messiah.

John just says he is a voice in the wilderness. He is preparing the way for the one who is coming after him. He never makes the focus about himself. It's always about Jesus.

I think we can learn a lot from this scripture passage. One of those things is following John's example of always pointing to Jesus and not to ourselves.

It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that **we** are doing ministry. **We've** organized this, **We've** recruited volunteers. The focus is on the we or the I, rather than God who equips us to do ministry.

In this passage, John never misses a beat. His focus is always on the one who is coming after him.

In this time of waiting and preparation for the holidays it's easy to put the emphasis on ourselves rather than on the one who is coming. We might be putting the emphasis on decorating, baking, and organizing family schedules. They aren't bad things, but sometimes they cloud our focus to pointing to Jesus.

There are things that we can do as we prepare for the holidays. As we bake our Christmas cookies, we can make extras and take them to the local homeless shelter or to a neighbor who doesn't have the time because they might be single parent working two jobs just to make ends meet. Or we might take baked goods to an elderly person who can no longer make the things they enjoy.

In the midst of our decorating, we might know a family in the community who needs a tree and decorations. We could take the time to brighten up another family's day by giving them what they may not be able to have because of life's circumstances.

While we are shopping we have countless opportunities to buy toys, books, and clothing for toys for tots, tree or angels, and many other charities. We also have the opportunity to make contributions to many charities who are trying to make a difference in this community and in the world.

In doing these acts of kindness we look beyond ourselves to something that Jesus asks us to do. We serve him when we serve others.

Sometimes it takes us to take a step back from our own preparations to see outside of our own box. The checklist will get done, but as we are doing it, we can look beyond ourselves and show God's love to others.

When we serve others we point to the one who is coming. We demonstrate God's love in our acts of kindness.

Our focus looks beyond our own needs and points to opportunities of what God would have us do.

As a community of faith we too need to point to Jesus here in this place. There are things that we need to be mindful of, not only during the season of Advent, but throughout the entire year. We are God's ambassadors – called to proclaim God's love.

David Bartlett writes in the commentary *Feasting on the Word*:

At Advent, our worship, always in danger of being self-contained, slouches toward self-satisfaction. How beautiful the decorations, soothing the sermon,

uplifting the music, cute the children lighting the candles! The questions we ask of every Sunday's worship are especially questions for Advent. Is God worshipped? Is Christ proclaimed? Do we bear witness to those who wander into this family celebration puzzled and lonely?

In our life together as a community we are called to witness to God. Do we welcome the stranger in our midst? Do we invite a visitor to sit with us? Do we share the peace with the newcomer? Do we explain the order of the service with someone if they look like they are having trouble following along?

It's easy in our own lives and as a community to be caught up in everything around us and not even realize that we may not be pointing to Jesus the way that we would like to be.

John reminds us that we are called to witness about the one who is coming. – We are to point to Jesus Christ. We should try to live our lives, both as individuals and as a community, always pointing to the one who is coming.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.

