

We Respond to God's Word

RESPONDING PRAYER Unison

Gracious God, who anointed and baptized One to be the Guide for all humanity, unbind us that we may respond to your word and be filled with your Spirit. Equip us to abstain from evil and hold fast to the good, that we are preparing for the Lord's coming into people's lives and hearts through us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

SHARING OUR JOYS AND CONCERNS

PASTORAL PRAYERS/THE LORD'S PRAYER

PRESENTATION OF OUR TITHES AND OFFERINGS

*DOXOLOGY

UMH 95

PRAYER OF DEDICATION Unison

May our gifts be as generous as your provision for us, O God. Use them to bear witness to the light you sent in Jesus Christ. Move us and all people to prayer, rejoicing, and thanksgiving. As we administer these offerings for their best possible return, keep us faithful to your purposes. In Jesus' name. Amen.

We Go Forth to Love God and Serve One Another

*HYMN

My Jesus, I Love Thee

UMH 714 (vs. 1 & 3)

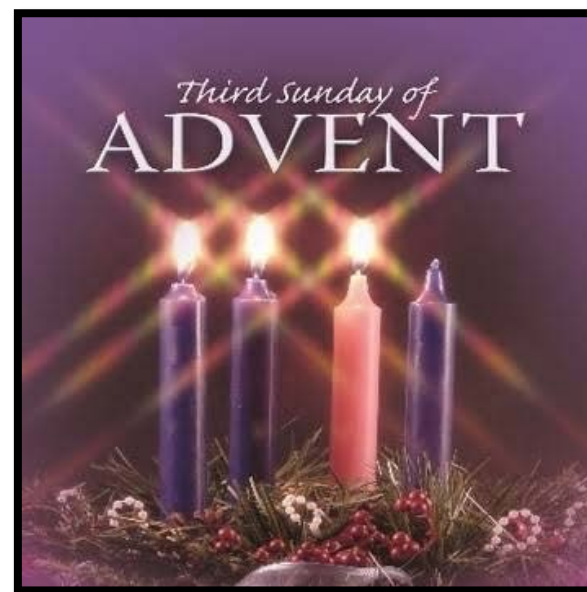
*BENEDICTION

Pastor Jenny Lee

POSTLUDE

Upper St. Croix Parish

ONE Parish THREE Churches:
Grantsburg: Central, Atlas, St. Croix Falls
December 13th, 2020
"The Third Sunday of Advent"



The United Methodist Church

10:00 am Online Zoom Service

CONTACT INFORMATION

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www.upperstcroixparish.org

Upper St. Croix Parish
Grantsburg: Central, Atlas, St. Croix Falls
December 13th, 2020
“The Third Sunday of Advent”

This bulletin is for a Zoom Service and home service..

PRELUDE

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

BLESSING OF ADVENT CANDLES AND WREATH

LIGHTING THE THIRD CANDLE

ADVENT SONG

TFWS 2090 (vs. 3)

PASSING OF THE GREETINGS

“Peace be with You!”

We Celebrate New Life in Christ

***CALL TO WORSHIP** Responsive

A voice cries in the wilderness,
and we find ourselves drawn to the message.

**God invades the commonplace,
and we cannot evade the changes God brings.**

On every hand our values are challenged
as attention is drawn to the lowly and weak.

**We are not worthy to untie the sandals
of the Humble Servant, who loved all people.**

Draw near to join those who rejoice
in a God who comforts and confronts.

**We come to proclaim the worth of God.
and to claim the worth God invests in us. Amen.**

***OPENING HYMN**

Hark, the Herald Angels Sing

UMH 240 (vs. 1 & 3)

OPENING PRAYER Unison

Bring us the good news we need, O God of All Holiness, for our spirits are faint within us. In our weariness we seek comfort, salvation, and liberation, for ourselves and for all your children. Be among us, revealing again more than we are ready to hear or see. Attune us to that which we avoid, and help us to view your saving activity. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Proclamation of God’s Word

***THE GOSPEL LESSON**

John 1:6-8, 19-28

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

¹⁹ This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰ He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” ²¹ And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” ²² Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³ He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ “as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” ²⁶ John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷ the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” ²⁸ This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

This is the word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

HYMN OF PREPARATION - *Special Song*

Lily Benge Briggs and Two Friends

SERMON

“Make Straight the Way of the Lord!”

Pastor Jenny Lee

*(If you are not able to join us for Zoom Live Service,
one of your family members may read the written sermon,
or view the video clip on Facebook.)*

December 13th, 2020
John 1:6-8, 19-28

Pastor Jenny Lee, Ph.D.
Upper St. Croix Parish UMC



“Make Straight the Way of the Lord!”

About two thousand years ago, people faced a chaotic era in Judea. God no longer sent them prophets anymore. The people had been suffering from the colonial exploitation of Rome. However, they did not give up hope that God may send the Messiah, who would save them. One day, there came a man from the wilderness. He was very different from everyone else, wearing clothing made of camel's hair, a leather belt around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey (*Mark 1:6, Matthew 3:4*). He proclaimed, “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near” (*Matthew 1:2*), and performed the baptism of repentance for people. Many people expected him to bring hope. Some thought that he must be the Messiah. Many people followed him wanting to be his disciples and received baptism from him. According to a historical record, it was like a sect movement because many people admired and followed him. Therefore, political and religious leaders paid attention to his acts. They sent people to watch him, wondering if he was the Messiah God promised.

Many people also paid attention to him, wondering if he was the Messiah or Elijah. Elijah was the greatest prophet in Israelite history, who did not die but was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind (*2 Kings 2:11*). Israelites believed that Elijah might come back as the Messiah. So, some suspected that John might be the returned Elijah. John the Baptist's ministry was a big sensation for the people, making people change their worldview as “urgent eschatological hope.” John the Baptist was very famous as the Gospel of Mark describes, “people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him.” However, John never forgot that God sent him with a mission to point to Jesus Christ, and he lived his life in pursuit of that mission. The political and religious leaders sent people to John to ask if he was the Messiah God promised (*John 1:19*). John said to them clearly, “I am not the Messiah.” They asked him again, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” People asked him continually, “Are you the prophet?” He said, “No.”

Our human nature leads us to want to be the master, the leader, and the superstar (the highest person). However, John confessed, “I am not the Messiah” (*John 1:20*). He knew very well who he was and what his ministry was. He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’ as the prophet Isaiah said.” It was a very humble confession. The word “voice” means “sound,” and does not mean an opinion. Sound or voice means “a temporary echo,” not a particular being. It implies that he confessed that he was an echo to pass by to prepare for the way of the Lord.

The disciple John wrote the Gospel of John to educate people that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah God promised. The disciple John says about the purpose of the Gospel of John, “These are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (*John 20:31*). We can imagine how people were confused thinking John the Baptist was the Messiah. Some people used to compare him with Jesus -who had more disciples and who baptized more people (*John 4:1*). However, John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus to follow him (*John 1:35-37*). He said, “He must become greater; I must become less” (*John 3:30*). When people questioned, “Are you the Messiah?” he answered, “I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” At that time, the slaves untied their master's sandal. The masters did not bend at the waist to untie their sandals as it was considered undignified. John the Baptist used the metaphor from their culture to be less than a slave to Jesus. John the Baptist stood in the faith firmly with his mission.

John the Baptist was clear for his vocation, “Making straight the way of the Lord.” To make straight the way, constructors should work hard. Imagine a straight highway. How is it we have straight highways? That is, many workers worked hard to destroy hills and mountains and to fill up the valleys. A straight highway is much easier and faster to travel than a route with lots of hills and twists and turns. A construction worker helps to make it possible for us to reach our destinations quickly and safely. As such, John the Baptist knew his destiny to make straight the way of the Lord. It is not a glorious way, but a scarifying way. Nevertheless, he fulfilled his mission significantly.

We need to know who we are and what our missions are. Furthermore, we have to fulfill the mission. John knew that he was the voice for the way of the Lord. The Gospel of John says, he “was a man sent from God. He came as a witness to testify to the light so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light” (*John 1:6-8*). We are also sent from God to our family, our workplace, our community, and our country. God wanted people to believe in God through us. In this advent season, we have to think about who is making ‘straight the way of the Lord’ and what we can do to facilitate the Lord’s coming into people’s lives and hearts. Our purpose is not to draw attention to ourselves but to point to the risen Christ who is in us and among people. Christ might be among the poor, the weak, the valuable, and the powerless. Do not forget God’s plan is beyond our thoughts.

I learned about a prophet, who knew himself, and what his mission was. But he avoided his mission because he did not like it. His name is Jonah. He was sent from God to Nineveh. God wanted to save the people of Nineveh through Jonah. But, Jonah hated the people of Nineveh that were to be saved. He went down to Joppa, running away from God. Finally, he got on a ship toward Tarshish. God sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. People asked him who he is and what happened to him, in order to figure out why the crisis came to them. Jonah said to them, “I am a Hebrew and worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.” He knew about God very well. He was proud of himself that he was a Hebrew. Proudly and confidently, he said to them, “I worship the Lord, the God of heaven who made the sea and the land. But I ran away from God.” How could it happen? How dare a person who worships the Lord, run away against God? This terrified them, how he could run away from God, it was the Lord who made the sea and the land. They could not understand how he, who worshiped the Lord, ran away from God. They prayed to the Lord, “O Lord, do not let us die because of this person. This is in your plan.” Jonah knew about God as the Creator, knew himself as the chosen people, and knew his mission. However, he ran away to avoid his mission from God.

How about us? In this advent season, are we doing like Jonah or like John the Baptist? We say, “We are Christians, and we worship the Lord.” But, let us think of ourselves and if we may be ignoring what the Lord wants us to do. John the Baptist made the people’s arrogant minds and stubborn hearts soft, showing humility and sincerity so that they may believe in Jesus Christ. He fulfilled his mission, trying not to be an obstacle to the way of the Lord. He pointed to Jesus Christ, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” And he denied himself, “I am not the Messiah. I am not Elijah. I am not the prophet. I am not worthy to untie his sandal.” He did profound self-denial even though he could have honor and authority from many people. He lifted Christ up higher and he humbled himself thoroughly. He knew already the way of salvation Jesus taught later.

Jesus taught his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (*Matthew 16:24*). Let us be the way of the Lord! May the Holy Spirit come to us and empower us to be the way of the Lord so that many people believe in Jesus Christ through us. Let us be the channel of God’s grace! Thanks be to God!

Announcements (Insert) December 13th, 2020

1. Today is the Third Sunday of Advent. Let us have this time of renewal on our minds, hearts and souls in Christ's promise and share and love one another.
2. The AD Council Meeting via Zoom at Grantsburg is at 6:30pm on December 16th, and St. Croix Falls is at 4pm on December 17th.
3. The UMC of Wisconsin Town Hall conference, "How Can/We Go to Church" will be held at 7pm on December 15 via Zoom. We are invited to attend by Bishop Hee-Soo Jung and the Cabinet.
4. An Online Zoom Service is scheduled for this Sunday, December 13th at 10 am. The Zoom service link is below. This link will be posted on our parish website also. The link will be changed every Sunday.

Topic: 12/13/20 USPS Sunday Zoom Service

Time: 10:00 AM Central Time (US and Canada)

Click the Link to Join Sunday Zoom Service

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81059300156?pwd=NXIHeUJZUmNrWlh2Wk1tSWdttdis3QT09>

- If you are attending the Zoom service for the first time, you may be asked to download the Zoom app. It is free, you will need it.
- If you want to join with your smart phone with video, click the link.
- If you want to call and attend without video, you may dial the number below and enter the meeting ID and passcode.

+1 312 626 6799

Meeting ID: 810 5930 0156

Passcode: 751678

One tap mobile

+13126266799,,81059300156#,,,,,0#,,751678#

Any questions regarding technological issues for the service, contact pastor Jenny.

5. You can also participate via a **Toll Free Call (smart phone or landline)** every Sunday at 10:00 am by calling 1-888-222-0475 and enter participant code 2938435.

6. You can listen to the service (scripture lesson, song, sermon and prayer-about 30 minutes) by phone Sunday afternoons whenever you are able by calling 1-715-298-0854. We will upload the new recording every Sunday afternoon following the service.
7. We need volunteers to be liturgists every Zoom Sunday. If you are willing to be a liturgist, let Pastor Jenny know which Sunday you are available, and we welcome a special song with your family members.
8. If you miss a Zoom Live Sunday service, you may view a video clip on Facebook or use materials provided (mailed, emailed or on the Parish website) for a home service. You may want to send your giving (offerings) to your church. If you have any questions regarding services or offerings, please email the church office at: centralumc2016@gmail.com

You may send your giving (offering) to your church **Please make your check payable to your individual church's name.** (*Central UMC, Atlas UMC, St. Croix Falls UMC*)

Atlas UMC: PO Box 254, Luck, WI 54853

Grantsburg-Central UMC: PO Box 128, Grantsburg, WI 54840

St. Croix Falls UMC: PO Box 458, St. Croix Falls, WI 54024

9. This Week's Birthdays and Anniversaries:

Copelan Grimes 12/13

Jeff Tooze 12/13

Daniel Harmon 12/16

Kim Wheeler 12/18

Ali Goepfert 12/18

Patrick Grimes 12/18

Brody Woltz 12/19

