**Sermon Title: A Voice, A Vision, A Way**

**Biblical Passage: Matthew 3:1-6 (NRSV)**

**December 4, 2022**

**Biblical Passage and Summary**

The Biblical passage for today uplifts the proclamation of John the Baptist in the wilderness of Judea. He cries out “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come” (v. 2). John the Baptist speaks the words of the prophet Isaiah in the scripture on which Pastor Warnock shined a sermonic spotlight: “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight’” (v. 3b). John spoke as one prophesying what was to come. Although he may not have looked like what the people expected, he prepared the people for the one who was greater than him who would come after. The scripture ends, “The Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan was going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins” (v. 5-6).

**Sermon Points**

In the spring of 1968, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel introduced Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to an assembly of rabbis, calling Dr. King “A Voice, A Vision, and a Way.” He called on those gathered to harken his voice, to share his vision, and to follow in his way. Those were dark and difficult days. Abraham Joshua Heschel the prophet knew a prophet when he saw one. These are difficult days and like those days, we need prophets to shake us out of our slumber. Prophets turn our world upside down in order to turn it right-side up. Priests comfort the afflicted, and we need that. But prophets afflict the comfortable, and we need that too. Prophets help us to hear and see glimpses of God’s vision for the world and in the spirit of Advent, anticipation. Prophets have a way of raising our spiritual antennas so we might anticipate the brand new thing that God is doing in the world. Sometimes we miss God because God doesn’t look like what we expect God to look like. God was about to show up in a new way. Sometimes the Church needs the voices of those on the margins because we can become too comfortable and think that we have this religion thing all figured out. When you see all the bigotry in America today, you cannot talk about it without referencing the Christian church. The judgement of God is upon us and so the voice of John the Baptist shows up in the wilderness.

1. **A Voice |** “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness…”

First, we need a voice. We need people with the courage and conviction to preach. You don’t have to put those of the priestly class on a pedestal as there is a way that all of us are called to be prophetic. In a moment like this, we need voices. As we prepare for the upcoming election, we need voices. We can thank God for the voices of the martyrs who sacrificed their lives so that we can live the lives we do today. Don’t let anyone mute your voice or stop you from speaking.

1. **A Vision |** “Make his paths straight.”

A vote is a way to pray and prophesy God’s vision in the world. In all four gospels, they mention John the Baptist, whereas only two talk about the birth story. Furthermore, the scripture lifted up Isaiah 40. Not only do you need a voice, but you need a vision of God’s intentions for the world. The scripture says…Every valley shall be exalted; mountains and hills shall be made low: In other words, the low places will be brought up and the high places brought low. There is a leveling of the playing field; there is equity. Every now and then we need a voice and a vision to bring equity in the world. The crooked places shall be made straight: Not only do we need some equity, but we need some integrity. The rough places shall be made smooth: There is also possibility. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: There is inclusivity.

1. **A Way |** “Prepare the way of the Lord…”

God loved your flesh enough to take on your flesh. That’s what advent is all about: A voice, a vision, and finally a way. Pastor Warnock said, “I don’t know what the future holds, but I know the one who holds the future. My God will make a way out of no way.” There was a 105-year-old man who voted this week. He was born in 1917, the same year Pastor Warnock’s father was born. This man showed up to prophesy. The scripture says that all the Lord’s people can be prophets. God has a vision inside of you.

**Reflection Questions**

1. Who are some people you would consider modern-day prophets?
2. Have you ever witnessed or experienced God in an unexpected way or unexpected place? Explain.
3. Have you ever spoken out in the face of wrongdoing or in a difficult time? What was the situation?
4. What is a vision God has given you?
5. What does it look like to bring about Isaiah 40 in your school, on your job, in our community, and in the world? What are some action steps we might be able to do to move toward this?