

John the Baptist
Luke 1:57-66

This past week, many of you know that Pastor Dave and I (and our kids)
were at Camp Lutherdale in Wisconsin,

Along with 11 of our confirmation students,
For confirmation camp.

It was a wonderful week,

Albeit rainy,

But even that was fitting,

As “water week” was the camp theme.

Our students were engaged in many camp activities,

And on several mornings,

We’d catch up with them at breakfast only to hear their
voices scratchy and faded.

Whether it was from singing loudly,

Or simply yelling during camp games the night before,

A couple of students told me that it even surprised them
that morning when they tried to speak. . .

And their voices were practically gone.

Now of course this was temporary,

And later in the day,

Their voices had returned.

But it made me think about Zechariah a bit.

The man who, in his old age, didn’t quite believe the angel Gabriel
when he announced that Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, would
have a child.

The man who, upon his disbelief, was struck mute until the
day of his son’s birth.

We may have an experience here and there of forced silence,

Of lost voices,

But imagine that 9 months that Zechariah lived. . .mute.
9 months anticipating the birth of his child. . .mute.

Zechariah's son is John the Baptist,
and we commemorate John's birth today.
John's birth is the only birth besides Christ's for which we hold a feast
day in the Church.
We celebrate many saints in the Church year,
Many have their own feast days. . .
But those typically fall on their death dates,
Not their birth dates.
Today we hear the story of a birth.
A birth that,
In itself,
Heralded the birth of the Messiah.
A birth that, in itself, was proclamation.

Because at John's birth,
Zechariah's voice returned.
More specifically,
At the naming of John,
When Zechariah writes "His name is John,"
Zechariah's voice returns.

In describing the events in our Gospel today, St. Augustine wrote, "The
tongue of Zechariah is released because a voice is being born."
The voice of the one crying out in the wilderness,
The voice of the one who will prepare the way of the Lord.

John's birth signals the beginning of a new way,
A new covenant,
A new relationship between God and God's people.
And in remembering John's birth today,
We remember that we, too, point to that new way that he
heralded.

And we, like Zechariah's voice, have been released.
Our tongues loosed,
Our voices freed from silence.
Like Zechariah's voice,
We are no longer relegated to silence,
The world is no longer safe from our voices that will
continue to proclaim love,
Mercy,
Redemption,
Belonging,
And hope beyond all expectation.
No longer is sin safe to run rampant among nations,
At borders,
On the streets,
In our relationships,
In our minds and hearts.
No longer is sin safe from the truth of Jesus Christ,
From the power of Jesus Christ.
No longer is sin safe.
No longer is death safe.
No longer are the powers of this world safe.
No longer are the evils that surround us safe.

For “we are saved from our enemies and from
the hand of all who hate us.”

This is exactly what John the Baptist was sent to proclaim—
That no one and nowhere can escape being redeemed by Jesus
Christ.

Not the injustices we inflict.

Not the families we rip apart.

Not the racism, sexism, ableism and every other -ism that
our privilege incites.

For “God will guide our feet into the way of peace.”

No one and nowhere can escape being redeemed by Jesus Christ.

Not the addiction we can’t kick.

Not the depression that grips us.

Not the cancer or the chronic illness or the Alzheimer’s that
changes the course of our lives.

For “the dawn from on high will break upon us.”

Nothing can escape being redeemed by Jesus Christ.

You cannot escape being redeemed by Jesus Christ.

You already are.

This is what John the Baptist was born to proclaim,

And it is what WE were born to proclaim.

This is what OUR tongues have been loosed to proclaim.

And that is why we are not silent when we see hatred,

When we see injustice,

When we see the powerless and the broken.

Because we simply can’t be silent.

God’s love and mercy are reserved for no one,

Because they are showered on everyone.

At the end of our week at Lutherdale,
 We worshiped together in one of the many beautiful outdoor
 gathering spots by the lake.
And it was lightly sprinkling when worship began,
 But during the communion liturgy,
 The rain started coming down harder.
And I was serving the bread,
 And my loaf was getting soggy,
 And we were all getting soggy. . .
And yet we were all singing,
 All tasting and chewing and swallowing,
 All of us wet. Everything wet.
As I was sharing the bread—the body of Christ—with those gathered,
 I thought, “I have never experienced Holy Communion standing in
 the rain before.”
And it was so fitting to have the earthly elements of both sacraments all
around us,
 To touch,
 To taste,
 To feel.
There’s something vulnerable about being wet when you don’t expect
to be.
 Just as there’s something vulnerable about opening our mouths
 and using our voices to speak out,
 To speak up,
 To speak the truth of Christ.
But not one of us was more wet than another that morning at camp.
 We were all drenched together.
 Just as we are all sent together in our vulnerability,
 With a message to proclaim to the world.

In the falling rain that day at camp,
We were recipients of a baptismal reminder—
The baptism that John came to proclaim.
And we were fed with the body and blood of Christ—
The Messiah who John came to proclaim.

And in the water,
In this Meal,
We are reborn and refreshed,
Renewed and strengthened.
And the truth of Jesus Christ sets free our tongues and our voices,
Sets free our very lives.

And so, we pray,
Loose our tongues, Lord.
Let us loose in this world, just as you set John loose from birth to
point to Christ.
Loose our tongues so that, in your power, we may loose
others.
Loose our tongues so that all that comes from them
might be healing, holy, and true.