

When a young woman brings her new boyfriend home to meet her parents,...and then later she asks her parents what they thought of the guy,...what do you think she hopes to hear? ..Something like, "Oh, he is very nice,"...or, "He seems like a very nice boy."...What she doesn't want to hear is, "Well, he certainly is different."...My wife Cathy never told me this, but I've always suspected that's what her parents said about me...Thank God she didn't listen to them...I think a lot of us don't want to be "different."...We want people to like us, to accept us, and one of the safest ways to do that is to blend in,...to be like everyone else...That might be ok most of the time, but not when it comes to following Jesus Christ...That's never been about blending in, being like everyone else...Following Jesus means to try to be like Him,...to respond to life, and to relate to people the way He did...And doing that can certainly make us "different."...When it comes to being different for Jesus,...there's no better example than John the Baptist.

John the Baptist was a man who certainly was **Different**....John lived in the desert, was half-clothed in camel hair with a wide leather belt around his waist...He lived on a simple diet of wild honey and munching on grass-hoppers...Thousands of people flocked to the desert wilderness to hear this loud-mouth preacher who preached like no one they had ever heard,...warning them to repent because the long-awaited Messiah,.. the Christ, was close at hand,...and exhorting them to be baptized and cleansed of their sins...John believed so strongly that the Messiah - Jesus Christ - was about to come into their midst, .. that he constantly cried out to the listening crowds, " Prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight the way of the Lord!"

John's preaching was having such a profound effect on the people, that the Jewish religious leaders were curious,.. so they sent priests out to the desert to question John...to find out who this wild prophet was...John responds by telling them who he was not..."I am not the Messiah,I am not Elijah, I am not the prophet."...Instead, he tells them he is simply a voice crying out in the desert,...**daring to be different**,...daring to announce that the coming of the Messiah was at hand.

John is a good model for us to **dare to be different**...During this Advent season, as we're preparing to celebrate the most earth-shaking event in human history - God sending His Son to live among us - we have a choice. ..We can go ahead and do what we do every year at this time (shopping for gifts, decking the halls, wrapping, baking, partying),...and when it's over go back to living pretty much the same way we were before, ...**OR**... ..we can **dare to be different**. ...We can refuse to let another Advent go by without it changing us...without letting the miracle of Christmas move us closer to becoming more like Jesus

Becoming more like Jesus is hard because we live in a society that pressures us to conform. ...You want to make a lot of money, you have to do this...You want to be popular, you better do this...You want to be accepted, you gotta do this... You want to be loved, you need to look like this... It's not easy to be different. ...You remember Kermit the Frog...What did he always say, "It's not easy being green." ...He's right...It's not easy to be different...You risk being insulted, ...ridiculed, even rejected. But if we truly believe in the one who lived His life so counter to the ways of the world,...if we truly belong to Him, ...then we gotta be green....We gotta **dare to be different**.

Most of us know the difference between a thermometer and a thermostat..They're both concerned with temperature. But they do different things...A thermometer measures the temperature of its surroundings...A thermostat is used to change the temperature to the temperature we want...Now some people R like *thermometers*. They merely register or reflect what is going on around them...If the world puts self before others,..so do they. ...If the world makes money and possessions top priority, so do they...If the world acts like lying and cheating is no big deal, so do they...Like thermometers, they just reflect what's going on around them.

Then there's other people who are like *thermostats*....they can **change the temperature, change** what's going on around them,...make it different than it is...They **dare to be different**.

My friends, as part of our preparation for the Lord's coming, we should ask ourselves, "Am I a thermometer or am I a thermostat?...Do I conform to this world, or do I **dare to be different**?" ... St. Paul urges us in Rom 12:2: "Do not conform....to the pattern of this world, but let God change the way that you think."...If we **dare to be different**, we need to let God change the way that we think... from the world's way to His way...The world says, "You have to be pushy and cocky to get ahead." ...God says, "The humble shall be exalted, and the exalted shall be humbled."....The world says, "Someone wrongs you, get back at them. Get even."...God says, "Forgive as I have forgiven you." ...The world condemns the sinner...God says, "Take the plank out of your own eye before you remove the speck from your brother's eye."...The world says, "It's your body...go have fun, do with it whatever you want."...God says, "your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit."...The world says, "If you do this, you'll fit right in."...God says, "Dare to be different, and you'll be helping me to make the world better."

It can be risky and uncomfortable to be different....It was for John the Baptist...He ended up beheaded in King Herod's prison. ...It certainly was for Jesus, .as we're reminded every time we look at the cross...Jesus warned us that being His follower comes with a risk..., but when you **dare to be different (DTBD)**, you will make a difference in all the places and all the people God has put in your life...you will make the world better.

For example: When others in the crowd are making bigoted or sexual remarks about someone or some group, **DTBD** ... Tell them it's wrong... When the only way to get ahead in your job is to go along with the company's shady business practices,..**DTBD**. Tell your boss, "Sorry, I'm outta here." ...When someone tries to get you to have that drink, to take those drugs or to have sex, ...**DTBD** ...Just say, "I don't think so, Baby!"...When you see someone in need, but if you stop to help, it'll make you late for an important meeting...**DTBD**...stop and help anyway....And you kids in school,...if you have a friend who's doing bad stuff that can really hurt them,...**DTBD** ..Take the risk of losing their friendship, and go tell an adult before something terrible happens. ...**DTBD!!!**

Why should we **dare to be different** ...when it's a lot easier to just blend in?" ...Before we answer that, we have to answer this...Do we believe what we're getting ready to celebrate on Dec 25? ...Do we believe that out of love for us, Jesus, left His heavenly home to come down to live a human life with all of its troubles and miseries, ...and .to show us what our God is truly like?...Do we believe He let Himself be nailed to a cross to take on the punishment for all of our sins?... Do we believe He did ALL of that out of love for you and me...If we believe that, then, how can we not want to give back to Him a small fraction of that love by trying harder to be like Him,...by daring to be different?...

Right now, many of us are going crazy trying to find the right gift for fussy Aunt Martha or for the guy who has everything,...but, we don't need to look very hard for the gift that will make Jesus very, very happy....That gift to Him is our promise to really try **to be different**... to show the world the joy and the peace and the freedom that come with living human life the way God meant it to be lived,...the way Jesus showed us it could be lived...And I'll bet this birthday gift to Jesus will mean more to Him than all of the gold, frankincense and myrrh from all the wise men who ever lived...On this 3rd Sunday of Advent - Rejoice Sunday -...let's give Jesus and all the angels of heaven a reason to rejoice....Let's **dare to be different**. Amen!