

3rd Sunday of ADVENT 2008

One of my all-time favorite movies is the classic **Wizard of Oz**...I'll bet many of you have it high on your list....You might remember near the end of the story just before Dorothy discovers that the Wizard of Oz is no more of a wizard than she, the scarecrow, the tin man, or the lion.... she cries out to the wizard , "**You're a very bad man!**" ...The phony wizard answers, "No, Dorothy, I'm a very **good** man, but a very bad wizard."....That's kind of like our friend John the Baptist who shows up every Adv.....He was a very **good** man who many people thought was a wiz...Thousands of people flocked to see this strange prophet who preached and baptized in the desert wilderness...John ate grasshoppers and wild honey, dressed in camel's hair and preached like no man they had ever heard...He was a man who was definitely **different**...The road the pilgrims followed to get to John was no yellow brick road...The road was a rocky, bumpy, winding trail...The only time roads were smoothed and straightened in those days was when a king was planning to visit his territory...Now John believed strongly that the King of Heaven – Jesus Christ – was about to come into His territory,...and that's why John kept urging the people, " Prepare the way of the Lord!..... Make straight the way of the Lord!"

John was such a wizard at convincing the people that the Messiah was near, that even the Jewish religious leaders were curious, so they sent priests into the desert to question John...to find out who this strange man was...John responds by telling them who he is not..."I am not the Messiah...I am not Elijah...I am not the Prophet returned from the dead."...He tells them he is not a wizard,... but simply a voice crying out in the desert,...**daring to be different**,...daring to announce that the Messiah was already in their midst....John is a good model for us this season to **dare to be different**.

During this Advent-Christmas season, as we prepare to celebrate God's amazing love for His people that He sent His Son to live with us as one of us,...as we get ready to celebrate the event that changed the course of human history,...we have a choice....We can go along and do the usual things we do every year at this time (the decorations, the presents, the parties, and all that)...and when it's over we can go back to living pretty much the way we were before, ...**OR**... ..we can **dare to be different**...We can refuse to let another Christmas go by and not have it change us...not have it move us closer to becoming the person God wants us to be...the person God **knows** we can be...a person who lives God's way,...not the world's way.

We live in a society that pressures us to conform...to be like everyone else...If you want to make a lot of money, you have to do this...If you want to be popular, you better do this... If you want to be accepted, you gotta do this... If you want to be loved, you need to look like this... It's not easy to be different... You remember Kermit the Frog...who is always saying, "It's not easy being green."...He's right, you know...It's not easy to be different...You risk being criticized, ...ridiculed, ..made fun of, even rejected...when you march to a different beat than those around you...But if we say we are Christians, that we believe in the one whose arrival we are preparing for,...the one who lived His life so counter to the ways of the world...if we really are followers of Jesus Christ...then we gotta be green....**We gotta dare to be different**...God sent us His Son Jesus to show us we were doing it all wrong... "Look at my Son, this is how I want you to live!"

I have two things up here with me: a thermometer and a thermostat...They almost sound the same,...and they're both concerned with temperature. But there's a big difference between them...A thermometer registers the temperature of its surroundings...A thermostat is used to change the temperature....raise it or lower it to the temperature we want...Now some people are 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 pursuit of money and things top priority,...so do they...If the world acts like lying and cheating to get ahead is no big deal,...so do they...Like thermometers,...they just reflect what's going on around them. ...Other people

are like thermostats. ...they can **change** what's going on around them,...they can make it different than it is...They **dare to be different**,...dare to go against the flow.

My friends, as part of our preparation for the Lord's coming, we should ask ourselves, "Am I a thermometer or a thermostat?...Do I conform to this world, or do I **dare to be different**?"... St. Paul tells us in Rom 12:2: "Do not conform....to the pattern of this world, but let God change the way that you think."...That's what we need to do if we **dare to be different**....let God change the way we think from the way the world thinks, to the way He thinks...The world says, "You have to be pushy and cocky to get ahead."...God says, "The exalted shall be humbled and the humble shall be exalted." ...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....so if it feels good, go ahead and do it."...God says, "Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit."...The world says, "Do this and you'll fit in." ...God says, "No,...do this and you'll be helping me to make the world better.'

Now I know many of us really don't want to be different....We want people to like us, and the safest way to do that is to blend in, to be like them....But following Jesus Christ has never been about blending in. ...Following Him means to be like Him,....to respond to life and relate to people the way He would.And there will be times that doing that makes you different....Yes, 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...But that's what being a follower of Jesus is all about— **daring to be different**, ...being a thermostat...making a difference in those places God has put you: your home, your office, your school, your friendships. ...

When others in the crowd are bad-mouthing someone or some group...don't join in. Tell them it's wrong...**Dare to be different**....When someone thinks you're the "village idiot" for forgiving that person who hurt you,...that's OK...**Dare to be different**... When it seems like the only way to get ahead in your job is to go along with your company's greedy business practices,...maybe it's time to say, "Sorry, I'm outta here." ...**Dare to be different**....When you're being tempted to have that drink or take those drugs or check out that porn web site...just say, "I don't think so, Baby!"... **Dare to be different**.

At this point, you might ask, "Deacon Ron, if it's so hard,...why should we **dare to be different** ...when it's a lot easier to go along with the crowd?"...Well, here's the thing...If we really believe what we are getting ready to celebrate on Dec 25...that Jesus' love for us is so great that He left His heavenly throne to come down to our level...to become one of us...to live a human life from infancy through adulthood with all of its troubles and miseries....If we really believe He came to show us the face of God....to show us what our God is truly like...to show us what God wants FOR us and what God wants FROM us...If we really believe He let Himself be nailed to a cross to take on the punishment for all of our sins...so that the gates of heaven would not be closed to us....If we really believe Jesus Christ did ALL that out of love for you and me...then, my friends, how can we not want to give back to Him a small fraction of that love?...Don't we do that with all the other loves in our life?

At the Last Supper, Jesus told His disciples, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." ...If we love Jesus, we will keep His commandments...We will **dare to be different** ... In this season of giving, when we are going crazy trying to find the right gift for fussy Aunt Martha or for that guy who has everything, ...we don't need to look very far for the gift that will make Jesus very, very happy...That gift is our promise to try to live like Him,....to **dare to be different**... to dare to show the world the joy and the peace that come with living human life the way God meant it to be lived...the way Jesus showed us it could be lived...This birthday gift to Jesus –

this promise - will be more precious 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.**