

3rd^h Sunday of Advent, Year B
Greg Kandra

Lectionary 8:

Isa 61:1-2A, 10-11

Luke 1: 46-48, 49-50, 53-54

1 Thess 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/121723.cfm>

Possible preaching themes:

- The implications and meaning of being “the voice” (from the Gospel)
- Discovering the difference between “hearing” and “listening”; do we understand what “the voice crying in the wilderness” is saying? Are we paying attention? (from the Gospel)
- The meaning and power of joy/rejoicing (related to reading from Isaiah)

Possible scientific resources:

- Concerning the human voice:
 - Studies of the human voice reveal why it is surprisingly versatile and able to be used for a wide range of purposes in communication and entertainment (<https://phys.org/news/2017-01-human-voice-versatile.html>)
 - The human voice is a powerful instrument for conveying emotion, feeling, empathy <https://www.vivavoice.uk/the-power-of-the-human-voice>)
 - A voice coach offers insight into why the human voice has such power (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/civcnation/2020/02/26/mark-my-words-there-is-power-in-your-voice/?sh=68f0f94c3b77>)
 - Insight into how we respond to the human voice emotionally from infancy (<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/03/100324121004.htm>)
- Listening versus hearing
 - We hear with our ears, but listen with our brains <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/hearing-with-your-ears-listening-with-your-brain>
 - The science of listening <https://www.kornferry.com/insights/briefings-magazine/issue-13/514-the-science-of-listening>
 - The nature of active listening and its contribution to empathic conversation <https://positivepsychology.com/active-listening/>
 - Being listened to is so close to being loved that sometimes our brains can't tell the difference <https://positivepsychology.com/active-listening/>
- The science of happiness and joy
 - Psychologists are seeking to understand the science of happiness / joy (<https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2007/01/the-science-of-happiness.html>)
 - John reveals self-awareness — knowing who he is and what his purpose is.

Psychologists say this is vitally important for all of us

(<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/click-here-happiness/201903/what-is-self-awareness-and-how-do-you-get-it>)

- o A TED talk on the difference between happiness and joy, from the viewpoint of physical design https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_u2WFTfbcg
- o Psychologists suggests that joy takes practice <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/06/29/1010319240/stuck-in-a-rut-sometimes-joy-takes-a-little-practice>

Homily outline: John the Baptist is “The Voice”: why that matters and why we need to listen

- **Introduction: John is introduced**

- This gospel introduces us to John the Baptist with the simple words, “A man named John was sent by God.”
- When he is asked who he is, he replies cryptically, “I am the voice of the one crying out in the desert.”
- This is one of the only times in scripture that someone identifies himself not by a job title, or a name, or a position, but by something almost abstract: a voice — something unseen but recognizable and vitally important.
- With that answer, John defines himself and shows a striking self-awareness. He admits he is not the message, but rather an instrument for helping to convey the message.
- It raises questions: what does he mean? What is the importance of being “the voice”? Science offers some answers.

- **The scientific turn**

- Voice researcher notes that “the voice is the main communication tool,” going beyond cognitive communication ... “It makes an emotional impact, translating feelings and emotions.
- Another voice professor says the voice, particularly in music, is able to stimulate emotions and make people live the story being told.
- Researchers have found that animals can produce a wide range of sounds, but the human voice is distinct for its range and versatility.
- The implicit message is that there is something unique and distinct about the human voice that you don’t find elsewhere in creation — and this makes teaching conveyed by speaking (not writing) more impactful. The preacher, like John, can give added power to what is being preached.
- Those who hear the message access more than just sound. Scientists have come to understand that from an early age our brains are wired to process information we hear and turn hearing into listening and learning.
- Also of note is John’s remarkable humility and self-awareness. He doesn’t announce who he is, or what his role might be. He seems reluctant to say anything about himself, until he finally declares that he is “the voice of one crying in the wilderness.” He knows his place. Psychologists affirm that “self-awareness requires self-examination.” This brief glimpse into John’s psyche suggests a man of introspection, contemplation and purpose.

- **John’s message**

- John identifies himself as “the voice,” giving an unexpected — and, really, unique — dimension to his ministry. Why does this matter? What makes it significant? Understood very plainly, a voice can obviously do what a word

cannot: it gives emotion, variety, depth and humanity to strokes of a pen. It makes the abstract concrete. It imbues it with life.

- By using his voice, and identifying himself that way, John is also able to reach those who cannot read. He engages a wider audience.
 - It's also interesting to see that John seeks no credit for himself. He directs all his energy and attention toward the one who will follow him. He serves another and clears the way for the one who is coming after.
 - As we near the end of Advent, John's presence challenges us to look beyond this season of waiting and watching — and remember just who we are waiting and watching for.
- **The Takeaway: Listening to The Voice before meeting The Word**
 - John “prepares the way” for the Messiah, not with letters or drawings or poems but with his presence — especially with his voice.
 - He is a living instrument, announcing (literally) The Word.
 - In his own time, people not only **heard** “the voice,” but they were moved to **listen**, to question, and to wonder. John provoked in those who heard him a response.
 - We respond to a voice differently than we respond to something written. Researchers tell us the mind is engaged more by speech than just words.
 - There is much noise in this season, and sometimes it is difficult for us to listen.
 - Each of us may need a little desert time for humbling ourselves before God's Word, so that we can acquire the prophetic spirit Paul mentions today.
 - A litmus test that we have listened and not simply “heard” comes to us from Isaiah. We have truly heard if we
 - Bring glad tidings to the poor
 - Heal the brokenhearted
 - Proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners,
 - And announce a year of favor and a day of vindication by our God.

Tags: hearing, listening, voice, word

About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way's sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.