

Preached by Dr. Carl A. Rush
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church
Alexandria, VA
December 5, 2010

Romans 15:4–13
Matthew 3:1–12

Transcribed from pastor's notes ...

JESUS GENTLE ... NEVER TAMED

Jesus is described by John the Baptist as the one coming after the one who is more powerful. John is constantly describing contrasts. He is less than the messiah, talks about birth right versus proper conduct, inner and outer purity, good fruit or bad fruit, God's kingdom vs. human kingdom, water or fire. John the Baptist does all of this in the wildest manner possible. He is just past the Qumron campgrounds, just before you arrive at the Dead Sea. He has all the dress and trappings of a character from Zechariah (13:4) or Isaiah. In fact, all four gospels, written for quite different audiences, include John's appearance.

Israel has been suffering for a long time and as abrupt as John sounds, he brings God's word of comfort. It is intriguing how many times God's word comes to us from outside our present circumstances. God speaks to us from a reality beyond our control.

In 1943 from his prison cell, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a letter to his fiancée, Maria von Wedemeyer. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is like John the Baptist, but he cried out during the early days of World War II. Anyway, he writes: "My dearest Maria ... by the time you receive this letter, it will probably be Advent, a time especially dear to me. A prison cell like this, in which one watches and hopes and performs this or that ultimately insignificant task, and in which one is wholly dependent on the door being opened from the outside, is far from an inappropriate metaphor for Advent. (21 November 1943, *Love Letters from Cell 92*, p.118).

We are in the midst of life, and we too are wholly dependent on the Holy Spirit to open our heart's door! Without that help, there can be no miracle of Christmas.

On December 10, the next film from *The Chronicles of Narnia* will be released. Without giving away the adventure, the *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* takes place when Lucy and Edmund are spending a dreary holiday with relatives, specifically, with their sour and cynical cousin Eustace. C.S. Lewis created *The Chronicles of Narnia* to teach lessons about being a disciple of Jesus Christ. In the series there is a lion, Aslan, who represents Christ. Aslan is gentle. Aslan is clearly compassionate, but the author is constantly reminding Lucy and Edmund that Aslan is not now and never will be a tame lion.

The Gospel of Matthew is a gospel full of adventure. Christmas is an exciting season meant to be a journey of faith. And church is supposed to be a spiritual adventure about following where our divine Lion, Jesus, is leading us. And what a wild adventure it is meant to be.

Fortunately Advent comes around to remind the church to cleanse itself of all our attempts to domesticate our Savior. Christmas startles us with its power to take over our lives. In all the places where we are most settled and too comfortable, Christmas calls us to repent. To literally change our minds – redefine our purpose and our course. Yes God calls us into this wonderful boat we call the church, but just like in the *Dawn Treader*, the adventure begins by falling into the water! Go see this new movie. I think it will prepare you for Christ's coming.

Next Sunday—or Friday night for the over achievers—I want to see who can tell me what turns Eustace into a monster and more importantly, what happens next?

Will we still follow our Lion of Faith?