

**December 9, 2012**

**Advent Two**

**Text: Luke 3:1-14**

**Theme: "Faith is Not Vinyl Siding"**

**Dänya and I are in the process of trying to reside our home. Right now, we are still arguing with the insurance company as to what are dents caused by hailstones and what are dents caused by footballs, baseballs, and the errant newspaper. However, if all goes well, and State Farm doesn't look too closely, we will have some new vinyl siding soon to replace the old aluminum siding. Now I am told that the great thing about the grade of vinyl we are looking at is that it will last for our lifetime. In fact, when we were picking colors we were told that at our age, this will be the last color we will ever pick for this house and the last time we would ever have to worry about the maintenance of the siding. So I guess that means vinyl siding must last about 100 years because I fully intend to live and work until I'm 150. Vinyl siding is wonderful, but not everything functions like vinyl siding. For instance, faith is not like vinyl siding.**

**The context of our Gospel for today goes back four hundred years to the last prophesies of the Old Testament when the prophet Malachi says that the Lord will come into his temple. So just before Jesus began his ministry, John the Baptist came to prepare the way of the Lord, to make straight the crooked paths. And now we are**

**called each year before the celebration of his birth to straighten out our crooked hearts.**

**Sadly, we are the religious people of our day. We are the crowds coming out to John the Baptist. We are the brood of vipers. We become lazy in our faith. It just happens. When you are all a bunch of good Lutherans with good Lutheran heritage, it is hard to remember that lineage accounts for nothing. Faith is not like vinyl siding. Most of us have fallen away into bad patterns of worship and church life at some time in our lives as though our faith needs no maintenance, no strengthening, no food. It has been harder for me to fall into such a pattern because I went right from my father, who never considered church an option, to Lutheran college, seminary and then my livelihood sort of depended on me being in worship. But there have been times even for me when I am here, but I am just going through the motions because I have to, not because I want to.**

**But people who don't have to be here find it that much more difficult to motivate themselves. There are so many interesting things to do in life. But John will tell you. It does no good to rely on family history or societal position. Your faith is not made of vinyl. It is more like expensive wood siding that has to be treated regularly with moisture barrier and insect repellent and stained or painted**

**every few years. Faith requires constant maintenance to stay strong. That is why, each year we are called to stir up our hearts. Get the lead out and be prepared to meet him when he returns for us by having our faith well nourished and strong.**

**Sadly, much of Christianity sees faith more like vinyl siding – sort of one and done. Get Baptized, maybe confirmed and then worship is just an occasional, optional activity to satisfy the parents and grandparents or to get that good old family feeling. Church is also convenient for weddings and funerals. That was the audience to whom John spoke as well. Have the proper position in society, make the appropriate sacrifices – “we have Abraham as our Father.” It is amazing to me how many people call Trinity to book a wedding and begin the conversation with,**

**“My grandparents were married there and were life-long members.” That is very nice but this is not a wedding chapel or a country club so where do you worship? See we only marry people here who are part of the family or are looking for a church home – a place to nourish their faith and to become strong and faithful Christians. Your family might have been direct descendants of Mary and Joseph of Nazareth themselves but big deal. Who our family is really has no bearing on our faith, either for the good or the bad. If**

**your family were a mob of reprobate murderers, you would still be welcome here to nourish and strengthen your faith.**

**Faith never static. The gift is that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for our sins. That is grace. Faith is the hand that holds onto grace. Either our faith is growing or it is dying. It is becoming either stronger or weaker. Advent reminds us that he is coming and we do not have the luxury of waiting to build our faith for he will come like a thief in the night and there will be no second chances for those outside the gates with a dead faith, yelling, but my grandmother was a Lutheran! Today is the day to prepare the way for the Lord. Straighten out those crooked hearts. Feed your faith with his Word and his Sacrament. Keep your faith strong and impenetrable. He comes.**