

Not, not, not, no. Four times in our short reading, we heard this negative word. John, it says, “was not the light.” “Who are you?” they asked him, and he confessed, “I am not the Christ.” “Are you Elijah?” “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” and he answered, “No.” Not, not, not, no. Does John ever say Yes? It hardly seems like it. He appears to be one great big No.

That is one word that children hate to hear from their parents. “Mom, can we...?” “No!” “Dad, can I...?” “No!” That word doesn’t sit well in the ears of children. They do not like to be told No. But I don’t think it’s much different for adults. “Can I get a loan from your bank?” “No!” “Can I go out with my friends Saturday?” “No!” “Can I...?” “No!”

No is kind of a depressing word. There isn’t much life and spring in it. It’s a concluding word. It ends things, like hope and expectation. No is like taking your car down a road and coming to a dead end. “Can I keep going on this road?” “No! It’s closed!”

Is there anything good about the word No? Yes! A barricade at a dead end could keep you from driving your car into a creek or off a cliff. We may not enjoy the word No all that much. But it has its purpose.

John was sent by God to be the Advent preacher. And thus, he stood as a living barricade. He was not the light. He was not the road we are to travel. Rather, he was sent to tell us No. To point out which roads we are not to travel.

Jesus is the light. He is the road we are to travel in life. He is the one whose way we are to “*make straight,*” as John puts it. But with so many roads in life, so many paths, and some are quite appealing to us, to our flesh, it is vital that we do not take the path which leads to our destruction; a road that, if we travel on it, leads to a dead end.

The Jews had high expectations of John. Perhaps he was the promised Messiah, the Christ. Or perhaps he was the prophet, Elijah. Or maybe the Prophet Moses spoke of. But their expectations met a dead end when John simply told them, “No! I am not any of these!” “Then why are you here? Why are you preaching? Why are you baptizing?” They were confused. They struggled to comprehend why God would send someone just to say No.

Yet this is no surprise. Their ancestors struggled in the same way. Throughout the Old Testament, God sent prophets to warn His people, to tell them No. “No, do not keep going the way you are going in life. Stop! Turn around! Repent! Your way in life leads to destruction. It’s a dead end.”

But God’s people refused to listen. They continued to travel the road which led them further and further away from God. They ignored God’s barricades. And they plummeted to their destruction.

You and I are among those people who do not like to be told No. We like to hear positivity, not negativity. But there is a very good reason why God wants us to hear His Advent preacher. His

prophet, Isaiah, puts it this way: *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way.”*

Your sinful desires, and mine, take us down roads in life that will end with our destruction. We are sheep who have gone astray. And we are heading for the disastrous cliff.

Out of love, therefore, and great mercy toward us, God puts His Advent preacher in front of us like a barricade. “No!” he tells us. “Do not keep going the way you are heading. Turn around, because you are not on the road God has chosen for you.”

In Advent we hear No. No...No...No. But Christmas is coming where we hear Yes. Hear what St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians: *“All the promises of God find their Yes in (Jesus).”*

He is the Light, the Christmas Light. There is no darkness in Him at all. He is the Way, the way of eternal life. Jesus is no dead end. All who abide in His words, and who walk with Him in their life, are not disappointed. Not ever.

When you were baptized, this is the way, the road, that God put you on. With Jesus. But as you and I traveled through life, we became sidetracked, didn't we? We tried other roads. Appealing paths. We strayed like sheep. And maybe we are still straying.

But God made great and precious promises to you in your baptism. And all His promises find their Yes in Jesus. That is why, today, He calls you back to Him. He is your Light. No matter how dark your way in life has taken you, there is light for you in Jesus. This means that He forgives you, each one of you. However dark your sinful past, all is forgiven. Yes, all! And no matter where you have strayed, Jesus has found you. You still belong to Him.

And then, too, that road that leads to destruction – Jesus went down that road. He took that road all the way to the cross, to the destruction that was waiting for you. And Jesus took it in your place. And now there is waiting for you only life and salvation with Jesus.

There isn't a single No with Jesus. He is always Yes to you. He is where all of God's promises are fulfilled for you. Amen.