

SERMON FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT, YEAR B, 5.XII.2004, 10:30 A.M.
HOLY EUCHARIST □ LBW SETTING I
HOLY BAPTISM FOR MATTHEW AVERY & MASON AVERY SHAFFER
FOLLOWED BY ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING
ISAIAH 40:1-10; PSALM 85:12,7,8-13; II PETER 3:8-15A; MARK 13:1-8
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF SAINT JAMES THE APOSTLE / BROGUE,
PENNSYLVANIA

Jesu Juva!

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and
Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

“The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the Word of Our God will stand forever.”

– Isaiah 40:7,8

John the Baptizer, the Herald of “the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” as Mark’s Gospel so directly puts it, had a very brief career. He did not endure long before he was cut down. He lived just long enough, and in just the right place, so that he could proclaim the fulfillment of God’s promise to send an anointed Savior, the Messiah, to proclaim this one living Word witnessed to in all the thousands of words of Scripture,

proclaiming it to those who desperately wanted to hear it, to proclaim that Word also to those who emphatically did *not* want to hear it. He claimed to be preaching not his own word but that Word proclaimed by the Prophets of Israel, the Word of the LORD that came to men such as the priest, Isaiah; the Word of the *LORD*, longed for by souls that shared Isaiah's prophetic faith and vision; the Word of the *LORD*, dreaded by men of little faith who presumed to lead God's faithful people and to speak for them; the Word of the *LORD*, despised by those who governed the world not out of humble duty but out of their own boundless egotism, bending the knee before no god apart from themselves. John did not endure long. Neither had Isaiah endured longer than the wrath of a king could cut him down. John did not endure long, but the Word he preached, the living Word Whose way he prepared is still heard and is still welcomed in our hearts and in the heart of the Church of Jesus Christ around the world.

Today, Matthew and Mason will hear that same Word, and we will remind them of that fact, again and again. Though they are too young to listen, they will receive that Word today by water and the Holy Spirit, hearing God's Word of love for them in a place deeper than sound can penetrate, the Word of God the Father's love for them for the sake of His own and only Son, given for them, lost for them.

Though we pray that Matthew and Mason will both enjoy the fullness of a long and happy life, we know that they, too, will fulfill the word of the Prophet Isaiah by passing away with all of us like a sigh, like a fading flower after it is picked or gone to seed, like the grass that withers through winter frost or under the scorching summer sun. In God's Incarnate Word in Jesus Christ, through which the flesh and blood and bone of their tiny lives and ours is sanctified, and through that Word alone they and we together with the whole Church and people of God's own choosing will truly endure, endure forever. This is the clear

teaching of Scripture and the faith of the Church which we are called to believe and profess each time we witness a Baptism.

We are also called to believe this and to profess this faith with all our hearts when we are called and gathered as a Congregation of the whole Church in this place to look back on the past year of our life and mission and to look ahead to a new year together. Today, an ad hoc committee formed by our Council will challenge us as a Congregation to make some bold moves forward, steps forward that are intended to amplify our ministry of worship and of hospitality. This involves a risk, the risk of money, the risk of failure to realize the vision of outreach and growth we share. The risk of being the Church is very much like the risk of being a parent, the risk Erin and Shawn have taken, dedicating their lives to the children with whom they have been blessed, risking all that they are and have on three possibilities, on three new human lives. Thanks be to God that such risks of faith and hope are taken on the basis of God's

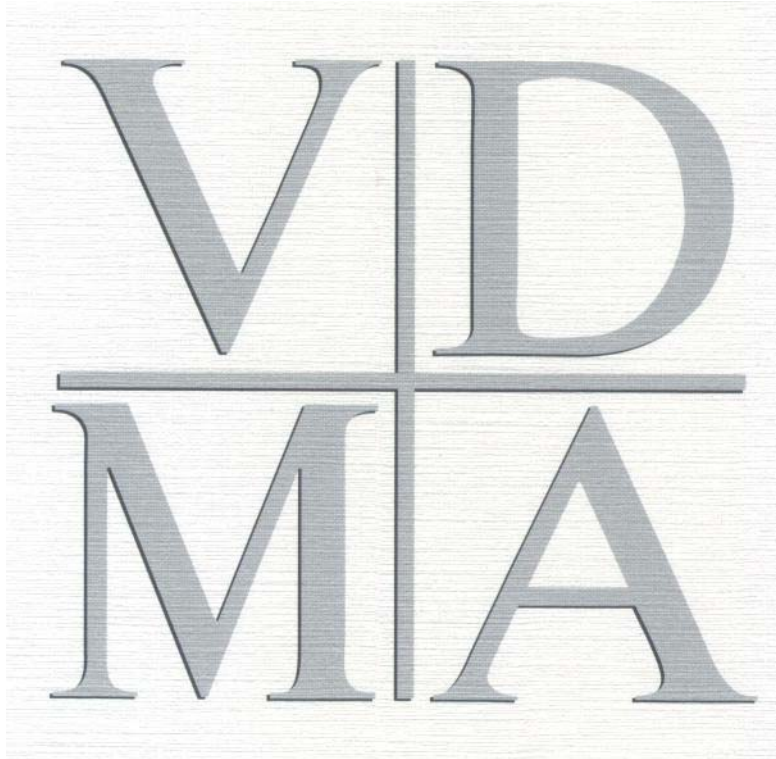
enduring Word, for the sake of that Word, and in the firm hope and conviction that, in God's love for us in Jesus Christ our children will endure beyond our ability to protect them, that our Congregation will endure and thrive as the Church in this place if our life and mission is centered on God's Word.

The Word of the LORD that endures forever is a word which God and God's Church speaks to all, just as God's love includes all, but, just as God's love is not accepted by all—as it means loving all whom God loves—neither is God's Word heard by all. God's Word is a word to all people which is rejected by many people, rejected by some as unnecessary or irrelevant, rejected by others as magical thinking or as the sign of a weak mind and will, and God's Word is rejected by still others as an unwelcome contradiction to their own cynical view of the world and those who inhabit it. Apathy, ridicule, hostility and outright opposition are to be expected where the Church in each Congregation and in each Christian's life proclaims this Word in

prayer and in practice. Matthew and Mason will come to know these if the faith in which they are baptized is also the faith by which they live. So will our Congregation, but that is neither reason nor excuse for us always to take the safe route by which we have walked before. May the Holy Spirit help us to step boldly forward this day into the future that belongs to Christ alone! ✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and has made of us a Kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. ✠ Amen.



Soli Deo Gloria!