

*Humble Herald'*

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based on Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; and John 1:6-8, 19-28

Many of you may remember a few years ago I brought my straw angel off the top of my Christmas tree as 'show-and-tell' for children's message. The angel is simple, plain, unassuming. I like to think she's a humble angel.

I used to put a star on top of my Christmas tree until one year ... probably the most difficult and emotionally challenging of my life ... I heard something different in scripture. When we read about how angels came to announce good news to the shepherds they began with the words, "Do not be afraid ..."

So from then on I've put an angel on top of my tree to remind me to not be afraid. God was with me.

A good friend named her: Herald.

Please pray with me:

Hark! Do you hear? Yes, Lord! We hear!

Inform our hearts; free our confined understandings; and open our hearts to receive your gift of grace. Amen.

The name of the newspaper in Omaha, Nebraska is: the Omaha World Herald. Years ago, before the age of Internet, more people in Nebraska got their world news from the Sunday issue of the Omaha World Herald than any other news outlet.

We usually think of heralds as making vocal pronouncements; but back in those days the written word held great value. Journalism wasn't demonized and the written word was crafted with care.

The Omaha World Herald was a valued source for information and news. People looked to the World Herald to open their minds and inform their decision-making. (Plus, they had a great comics section.)

We normally think of heralds as trumpeters, or vocal pronouncers. I especially like heralds who bring *good* tidings; they announce the arrival of royalty. Herald's make proclamations like: "Hear Ye! Hear Ye!" Listen up!

Prophets can be heralds. We look back and find famous prophet heralds throughout history.

Besides, Isaiah, there was:

Martin Luther King Jr.

Desmond Tutu

Susan B. Anthony!

The Apostle Paul!

Don't be intimidated by that list of famous heralds. Remember the humble, straw herald on top of an ordinary Christmas tree in my living room? It didn't just reassure me in a difficult time in my life – it reminds me we are all humble heralds if we choose to be one.

Being a herald can be intimidating. Just look at the list of famous names I just read off! But the great thing about being a humble herald is we are naturally insulated from arrogance and greed; we have a heart for Christ; AND it opens our eyes to what hubris and greed can hide.

A humble herald isn't afraid of giving voice to the way of Jesus.

The thing is ... we can't just call ourselves humble heralds. We have to BE humble heralds.

Giving voice to Jesus' way can be hard. Today's culture isn't exactly receptive to seeing wealth as a matter of the heart and not a bank account balance. There is real fear associated with giving voice to the good news of Jesus.

A humble herald isn't afraid. A humble herald knows God is near and consciously walks the walk of Christ.

So how do we become humble heralds in today's day and age when there are all kinds of messages out there that test our ability to be humble?

What does a humble herald look like? How does a humble herald act? What does a humble herald say?

My guess is that a humble herald would give God credit for the anointing to which they have been called.

C.S. Lewis describes a humble person as "someone who does not think less of themselves, but thinks of themselves less."

A humble herald would think of themselves less and more for those for whom God gives grace ... the oppressed and brokenhearted, the captive and imprisoned. The humble herald would think and act in ways to free others; to lift them up and encourage them.

The spirit of the Lord is upon the humble herald.

I also imagine a humble herald knows who they are.

The very first question the Pharisees ask John the Baptist was, "Who are you?"

In sum, John the Baptist's answer was, "I'm just a humble herald giving voice to the One who is to come."

Who are you?

Advent is a good time to get out the humble meter and ask yourself: "Who am I? I am just a humble herald in love with Jesus and Jesus' way of grace and peace."

Our job as Jesus followers is to rejoice in the Lord ... always! To pray without ceasing. ... to thank God in all circumstances.

We are called by our anointing to be heralds of the God of peace and love that compels us to share that good news.

We don't need trumpets or a newspaper with a large Sunday circulation ... we just need what God gives each of us: a voice .... and an anointing to be heralds who sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

John the Baptist was a voice (a herald) of one who called out from a wilderness of sin and death.

John drew people away from pride and hubris and helped them repent of their sin so they could re-enter the Promised Lane redeemed by grace and peace.

John stood at the river of salvation yelling "Hear Ye! HearYe! One stands among you whom you do not know ... he will lead you away from sin and death and bring you into a

place of eternal life.

“Hear Ye! Hear Ye! The Spirit of the Lord God sends every Jesus follower to bring good news to the oppressed; to bind up the brokenhearted; to proclaim liberty to those held captive by addiction and remorse; to proclaim liberty to those who dwell in darkness and who don’t know Jesus; and freedom to those held prisoner to sin and death.”

Who was John the Baptist? A humble herald who used the waters of the Jordan ... the boundary between the lost and the found; the dividing line between a wilderness of sin and the hope and saving grace of the Promised Land.

John consecrated those with a baptism by water marking them as repentant and hopeful. ... and who were made **READY** for the coming of the One who would save us all.

Who are we? ... I pray we are humble heralds, wading through the waters of our baptism ... who have an opportunity to accept that same Spirit of the Lord and allow God’s anointing to cry out: “Do not be afraid! We bring tidings of great joy! Repent! Live your baptismal vows!”

“Rejoice, pray, give thanks!”

Thanks be to God!

Amen!