

Worship Service for December 12th: 3rd Sunday of Advent - Joy

- **Old Testament:** Zephaniah 3:14-20
- **New Testament:** Luke 3:7-18
- **Responsive Reading:** Isaiah 12:2-6

Announcements:

- **Wednesday December 15th: Bible Study at St. Georges. Time: 7pm. Please bring your proof of vaccine. We are studying Acts 4.**
- **Friday December 24th: Christmas Eve Service of Hope (Blue Christmas Eve) Time: St. George's PC – 5pm; St. David's PC – 6.30pm.**

Sermon Title: Bear Fruits In Keeping With Repentance!

Last week we encountered John the Baptist in the wilderness preaching to the people about the baptism of forgiveness. He called on the people to prepare the way for the Lord. Luke took time to give us a historical data that would let us know that this story about John the Baptist was not made up. This week's passage is a continuation of John the Baptist's preaching to the people.

We see that the crowd continue to make its way to the wilderness to listen to John the Baptist. We should note something important here. When we purpose in our hearts to do what God has called us to do, He will back us up. John the Baptist was preaching in a wilderness, yet people left the city and towns and went to the wilderness to listen to him. Even important people in the society back then like the Pharisees, soldiers and tax collectors left their places of privilege to head to the wilderness to listen to John. If we as a church come together to make sure that we follow God's purpose for the church, it doesn't matter our location, He will send people to us to listen to the Word of God, the Word of Truth that we proclaim.

Another important information that we need to note about this passage is that this is good news. We hear John speaking to the people with really harsh words and insults, yet verse 18 tells us that "*with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.*" It is true that the delivery is harsh but Hebrews 12:5-6 tells us that "*My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.*"

This passage is good news; therefore, we shouldn't focus on John's harsh words. John knows his audience and he knows that it is only when he speaks to them in a certain way that will draw their attention to the seriousness of his message.

So John starts with this terrible insult, with these harsh words; words of condemnation and judgment. And then he exhorts them to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. John is not messing around here; he wants his audience to know the seriousness of sin. He also wants them to turn around to change directions, to turn from darkness and to turn towards God and the light. That's what he means by repentance.

And as they walk towards God, as they take steps in the light, he wants them to bear fruit in keeping with that particular walk. He wants them to do the work that God has instructed His people to do and to not just count on and have in their heritage to make them right with God. Luke continues *"Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.'"*

Sin is serious and while heritage is not necessarily a bad thing it is not enough. John is breathtakingly straightforward. Being a Jew isn't enough to save you from the coming wrath. Here's the point John is making; children of Abraham are not what God is looking for; good fruit is what God is looking for and so Luke continues *"Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."* Verse 9 points to a swift end, to a speedy judgment. Leon Morris, a New Testament scholar notes that this passage *"stresses the divine hostility to all evil."*

It's worth noting the trees are not yet cut down; judgment has not yet come. These words might seem and feel like judgment but that's not what they are. They are a warning of judgment that is to come. There is still time to bear fruit in keeping with repentance; to turn around and live in a different way. These words are harsh but all isn't lost. *"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."* These are strong words and a strong condemnation of evil and yet as mentioned before Luke tells us in verse 18 these words are good news. There's still time to bear fruits in keeping with repentance.

It is good news that God is hostile to evil. It doesn't always feel like that because there's evil that lives inside of you and me; that lives inside of the systems and

institutions that we love. And so we often can receive that judgment, that hostility to evil as personal because it is right. God is not indifferent, it matters to Him how we live our lives and so while it can feel like an affront, it is actually good news.

For once in the gospels, we see that the crowds don't seem to miss the message that is brought to them. They are not discouraged or repelled by John's harsh words and delivery of his message. The crowds acknowledge the problem and ask John "*what then should we do?*" How can we respond to your warnings?

John responds and tells them to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. What he is saying is, do what's right and not just for yourselves but for others and do it all the time. He is exhorting them to live lives of integrity and to live their lives for the sake of others.

John is giving us that same invitation today. The gospel of Luke is calling us to repent, to turn around, to change directions and to do what's right every time. Not just for ourselves but also for others.

John's good news may not be the kind of good news we are expecting especially when we are celebrating the third Sunday in Advent which is the Advent of Joy, but it is indeed good news. John proclaims a Saviour who will come into our world whether we are ready or not. A Saviour who doesn't care if we are Abraham's children or not. A Saviour who, because of his unceasing grace, will take away all that is broken and harmful within us – our greed and selfishness, our fear and hate – and leave only his best within us so that we can become a reflection of his grace. John proclaims to us a Saviour who will totally transform us if we will let him.

This Saviour will not come how we expect but how we need. A Saviour who loves us and comes to us even while we are yet in sin but who loves us too much to let us stay in our sin and darkness. He is the One who will baptize us with the baptism of fire, the light of the world who shines in darkness and darkness cannot overcome it.

John's good news invites us not to passively accept this Saviour who will come again but to actively prepare the way for him by bearing fruits in keeping with repentance. He invites us to cultivate spirits of generosity, integrity and compassion which are a reflection of our soon coming Saviour.

John is calling on us not to wait until we think we have the energy or until we feel ready and not to wait until he comes again. We have to repent right now, we have to prepare the way for the Lord now, we have to bear fruits in keeping with our repentance now.

You might not be a tax collector or soldier living in ancient Palestine, but what might an equivalent exhortation for your life, vocation or career field look like? What might it look like for you to bear fruits in keeping with repentance? The Bible tells us in Galatians 5:22-23 that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Let us walk in keeping with the fruit of the Spirit.

John's message is good news and this good news ought to spur us towards lives of repentance, of turning away from darkness and instead following Jesus. It also ought to offer hope and joy in a world still stained and twisted by evil and sin. That a day is coming when Jesus will return and evil will be vanquished and His Kingdom will finally come in completion on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Prayer

O God, our Strength and Salvation, we come before you with joy and thanksgiving as the beauty of this season unfolds with starry nights and sparkling snow, with faces that smile and generosity that grows even after a long, hard year of pandemic struggles. With the kindness of your Spirit, awaken opportunities for understanding to emerge among those who have differed, and refresh our community and congregation with joyful anticipation that your gift to us in Christ can change everything. Generous God, Send joy to the world again.

Tender God, We delight in the joy you bring into our lives and neighbourhoods through our life together in Christ, and through the love of family and friends. These gifts have sustained us through stressful times and we thank you. We pray for those who are finding it hard to be joyful this year, remembering those facing illness in spirit, mind, or body, and those waiting for diagnosis or treatment, as anxiety grows.

We pray for those who are lonely or in mourning, and all who have been touched by tragedy and violence. We pray for those searching for work, struggling with rising costs, worried deeply about their security.

And we pray for those working to bring justice to the discouraged and defeated, and those doing their best to care for the earth you love, despite the challenges. Use us to bring joy to others through our friendship, generosity and understanding. Generous God, Send joy to the world again.

We offer our prayers in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our hope, our peace, and our joy, who taught us to pray these words together:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

Go now and rejoice in the Lord always. Do not be afraid or worried about anything, but in everything trust God and pray. Bear fruits worthy of repentance, sharing what you have and being gentle with all. And may God rejoice over you with gladness; May Christ Jesus renew you in his love; and may the Holy Spirit give you peace beyond understanding to guard your hearts and minds in Christ. Amen.