

December 13 2015

Year B Third Sunday of Advent

Scripture Lessons ~

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:7-18

Sermon *What Then Should We Do?*

Verse 18 of chapter 3 of Luke's Gospel calls the words of John the Baptist, the good news. But the good news doesn't sound so good to us at times does it? John uses words like, "You brood of vipers, from these stones God can raise up children of Abraham- the wrath to come—the axe is lying at the roots of the trees and every tree that doesn't bear good fruit will be thrown into the fire."

You remember from last week's sermon that the early Christians saw John the Baptist as a kind of second prophet Elijah, come back to earth to prepare the way of the Messiah. John then is kind of like, for those of you that remember your youth the warm-up band at a rock concert, his job is to get the audience ready for that main act. Boy! John is a pretty tough act to follow. Verses 7 through 9 and verses 15 through 17 are packed with words, and emotions that might more readily drive the audience away rather than prepare the audience for that main event to come. There is guilt, there is fear, there is anger, there is disappointment, and there is not just fire, but unquenchable fire. But keep remembering; keep remembering that John wasn't the main act. He was preparing people for the coming of the main act. "I am not worthy to untie the thongs of his sandals", John said. And in order to prepare them for the main act; he had to get their attention and boy o boy, did he get their attention of that day. You see, John wasn't calling Greeks Romans, nor atheist, nor agnostic, Buddhist or Muslims to repentance that day. He was calling his fellow religious people, his fellow Jews and by association, calling to modern day us, as Christian followers of Jesus to repentance. John had seen their hypocrisy, their reliance on narrow interpretations of the law and he had seen their reliance on their favorite position as Abraham's children and he had seen as a result of all that, their lack of good fruit; their lack of mercy, love peace and joy and hope and compassion.

You know, those of you who know me, know I probably wouldn't have given John's message if I were in his position. Whether I would do it his way or not isn't really the point of it at all. The point is he had those people where he needed them to be that day. And the question which I think is a sincere question, and is, an important question. What then should we do? What then should we do? And it is a question that we could ask ourselves as we prepare to welcome that

same Jesus into our heart, into our homes, into our churches during this advent Christmas season. What then should we do? How should we do as modern day disciples to get ready? What should we do to prepare for the coming of Jesus into the world. Well I can tell you one thing, that hanging on to guilt; hanging on to fear; hanging on to anger; hanging on to disappointment; hanging on to anxiety might grab our attention today, are not going to get us where John wants us to go. And neither will our own hypocrisy, saying one thing and doing another thing or relying on narrow interpretations of scripture, or relying on some favorite status we think we might have in the eyes of God. So sandwiches between these words of John verses 10 to 14 of the Gospel lesson is the essence of what it means to be prepared for every single day to receive Jesus into our lives. Now remember it is not an exhaustive list, it is not an endless list but it is a list that gets us well on the way. Unlike any other Christmas list that we make for ourselves at this time of the year and it speaks of these things—sharing coats, and food; it speaks of receiving only our fair share in life; it speaks of refraining from resorting to threats and all accusations' when we deal with those around us; it speaks of being satisfied with the things that we have; and when you sum all these things up; what do they really speak of -acts of love, acts of compassion, generosity kindness, thankfulness; of not giving into fear or prejudice or paranoia or anxiety as some immediate presidential candidates would have us do in this modern day. These are the very same things Jesus came into the world to teach each one of us. The very same thing for our lives, our homes and our church ought be about as we go through this season together.

So what then? What then should we do? To prepare the way to the Messiah to come; what then is the Good News Jesus came to share. The good news is love came down at Christmas. Christina Rossetti, the author to the song we sing. "In the bleak mid winter" also wrote written in another poem. "Love came down at Christmas. Love all lovely, love divine. Love was born at Christmas star and angel is the sign". It is a new way of life that has come and that same new way of life of that same spirit of love that will help us make way for the child at Christmas, to come into our lives; and come into our hearts as well. And together we say AMEN.