

12-12-21 Third Sunday in Advent: Joy

Sermon- The One True Joy

Scripture- Luke 3:7-18, CTW Isaiah 12:2-6

Hymns- To be selected by PK, Dave

Theme- Joy is a term that gets thrown around a lot at this time of year...you see it on everything from tree ornaments to candy. Jesus came to give us the one true joy of a lifetime. Today John the Baptist gives us a reminder to not to EVER take it for granted.

I. Real Repentance Needs Fruit...Real Fruit!

"What should we do then?" the crowd asked. 11 John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same." 12 Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" 13 "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. 14 Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely--be content with your pay."

A. Some children were asked what joy is. The responses were quite interesting and instructive for us adults. One said, "Joy is when my mommy makes a cup of coffee for my daddy and takes a little taste before she gives it to him to make sure it tastes okay."

Another said, "Joy is when your puppy licks your face even after you've left him alone all day." A response was, "You really shouldn't say, 'I love you' unless you really mean it, but if you mean it should give you joy to say it a lot, because people forget."

One boy said, "When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth, and that will make you joyful. " And finally 7 year old

Bobby said, "Joy is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen."

B. Yes, Christmas is the time we think a lot about joy.

And it's also what motivated John's conversation with the crowds he encountered. It might not sound much like joyfulness, but it still is.

Because John knew that to announce the coming of the Savior would take a lot of pointed confrontation about sin, repentance and the fruit of repentance.

He knew that most people don't want to acknowledge their guilt before one another and God. He knew that most have much to be guilty about and that we all deserve condemnation for our sins.

And he knew that the only way we can receive the true Savior was to recognize our sin, repent of that sin and turn to a new life offered by the Lord who has gone to the cross to pay the penalty for our guilt before God almighty. The realization of all that should give us joy.

Remember the words of the Hymn written by Henry Van Dyke:

"Joyful, joyful we adore thee, God of Glory, Lord of Love. Hearts unfold like flowers before thee, hearts unfold like flowers before thee, opening to the sun above...All thy works with joy surround thee, earth and heaven reflect thy rays" Remember those beautiful words? **Those are key words of Advent. All that we do should reflect the Joy of God and His kingdom! He really is the "wellspring of the joy of living!"**

II. John wanted the joy and love of Christ to influence the whole year, each believer, and every church.

A. But Christmas as we know it can be such a part-time thing.

Christmas with all its trappings of lights, bows, beautiful wrappings, greens and such seems like just a temporary time

when the evil of the world is being hidden from view. And for some that is exactly how they deal with Christmas... they are prepared for things to be over with so they can "Get Back to Normal."

Have you heard that? Have you said that?

They put on their finest clothes, clean their houses, decorate their lives with false kindness, and act so sweetly even toward those who they dislike.

Some families spend the whole rest of the year bickering and arguing over petty jealousies and hurts and yet at Christmas they put that all under the wrappings and treat each other with smiles and hugs and kisses.

But only for a day or two. After the Christmas presents are opened and the decorations come down, they are once again at each other's throats...and back to "normal."

B. That's not the way John wanted Christmas to become.

Look at the way that John addressed the people who came down to the water of the Jordan River: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? **8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.** And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. **9** The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

John is speaking to the inner man and woman within each of our hearts, and he knows that the joy of knowing Christ does not reside there.

He knows that we are trying hard to hide our evil intentions and desires. He calls his listeners vipers for their vile hearts have made them deceivers of the highest order. They follow Satan

easier than they follow God, because since the first sin of Adam, we have allowed Satan be our master.

John is wrestling with the sinfulness in each one of his hearers' hearts. It's a mighty struggle he is engaged in. He must speak harshly or we will not listen. He must shake us free from the courteous discourse we are used to hearing so we will hear and respond to the tough but loving message he brings.

Do we have the "joy, joy, joy, joy down in our hearts, down in our hearts, down in our hearts to stay..." Remember singing that in VBS or summer camp? Any volunteers?

III. John must have had an impact on the people. The crowd must have heard his message. Because they began to ask him what his tough love message of doom without repentance really meant.

A. The people must have begun to worry about their eternal state of affairs. Maybe **we** should worry more about that too, as opposed to what we're going to buy for Aunt Esther or what we're going to get from mom and dad this Christmas.

If we really hear God's word and sincerely repent perhaps we would ask the same questions as the crowd. Sometimes it seems that with our idea of salvation freely given by God's grace through faith for Christ's sake, **that we forget to ask what we are to do.**

We wonder about the "correct way" to respond to that grace, how we are to act in our faith response. We wonder what Jesus would have us do to show the fruit of that faith we have by God's word and sacraments.

B. Christmas is a fitting time to ask these kinds of questions. The season seems to put us in the mood to reflect on the love of God and our response, or lack thereof, to it...And when we are content in the feelings, we want to stay there...at least in theory!

Hear what the crowd asks and how John responds. "What should **we** do then?" the crowd asked.

John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same."

Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should **we** do?" "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.

Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should **we** do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely--be content with your pay."

The crowd wants to know what John means by producing fruit of repentance. I wonder if they asked him, thinking he wouldn't know what to say.

Kind of like the pastor who was asked a question after a truly effective sermon resulted **in every one** in the congregation asking what they could do to serve the church.

Never having expecting such a response, he had no idea what to say!

John wasn't like that pastor, he had an answer to their questions.

To the crowd in general he knew no better response than for them to go forth immediately and share what they had with others!

C. It is important to notice that giving is an especially evident fruit of repentance. It shows that we understand who has really given to us in the first place. It indicates that we know that God gave his one and only son to be born in our world of sin.

It reveals our understanding that the Son of God gave his own life on the cross so that the penalty of our sin would be paid in exchange for our very lives. Giving is God's way and that is the way our fruit of repentance is manifested too.

As you leave the sanctuary today, I invite all of you to spend time **first in prayerful consideration of your joy**...is it an authentic kind of thing that is rooted way down in your heart because Christ himself dwells there, or is it more of a seasonal kind of thing that will fade as the decorations come down and you get back to that worldly thing called "normal".

And then, if your answer is truly that you are with Jesus for the long haul, then I invite you to expand this picture of Advent into a year long celebration and response to the joy His birth has deposited into your heart.

Amen? Let us Pray...