

Advent 3, Year C

- Luke's Gospel – lot more introductory material, takes setting the stage very seriously – wants us to understand the significance of the Incarnation, so he takes his time laying the groundwork
- So in this year, when we read from Luke's Gospel, get a double helping of John the Baptist – last week we heard **about** John, this week we hear **from** him
- And that's a little bit different thing, right? Last week, we heard the prophecy quoted about John, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low...' and that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God."
- And then, to really help us get into the Advent spirit, we hear John saying, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"
- For some reason, Loren didn't agree with me when I suggested that we use this as the salutation on our Christmas cards
- It's not the sort of thing we want to hear as we're gearing up for Christmas, preparing to celebrate the Incarnation
- It's not exactly what Christmas is all about...
- So it's important, I think, to realize that this passage about John the Baptist continues, doesn't end there
- First, John offers some more dire warnings – tells people to "bear fruits worthy of repentance," and that "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."
- But in response to this, of course, the people listening have questions – or, really, they have a question, the same question, that gets asked three different times by three different groups of people listening: "what should we do?"
- It's a question we've probably all wondered at some point, right? Once we realize all that God has created, once we recognize the ways we've fallen short, once we realize, as our reading from Philippians says, that "The Lord is near" ... then we tend to wonder, what does it mean for us? What should we do?
- And the answers John gives to his listeners all have a certain similarity:
- To the crowds, he says to share their food and clothing with those in need
- To the tax collectors, to treat people justly, not taking more than is owed
- And to the soldiers, be fair to those you have power over

- That's what it means, John says, to bear fruit worthy of repentance
- So what would the answer to us look like?
- What does it mean, as we approach Christmas, the great feast of the Incarnation of God, to bear fruit worthy of repentance? What should we do?
- Just as John gave three different answers to three different groups of people, I don't think there's one singular answer for all of us – what we should do differs, based on our circumstances, based on our ability and our means
- But I do have a story I'd like to share of one person who I think had an answer
- Video going around on the internet about someone in NYC – realized that there are a number of homeless people in the city, and they have needs, sometime simple ones, but that part of the problem is that people aren't always readily able to supply those needs
- But, in NY and some other large cities, he also realized, Amazon Prime will now make same day deliveries – so you can order something from their website and actually have it delivered later that day
- So what he did is have a conversation with some of the people he encountered on the streets, asking them if there was anything that they needed, what items they might be able to use – socks, or backpacks, or long johns – and then he placed an order on Amazon for same-day delivery, making sure to leave specific directions of where the delivery person could be sure to find the person he was ordering items for
- As you can imagine, it's a pretty moving idea, and for a couple of different reasons – first, he was actually engaging with those he encountered, people who were probably fairly used to never being looked in the eye, much less engaged in conversation – he was asking them what they could use, rather than giving them something he thought they needed
- But then, the video also shows the delivery people arriving – arriving to this moment that they probably didn't expect to be part of their day that day – approaching someone they don't know, someone on the street, and telling them that they have a delivery for them
- The video is just a series of several moments of shared humanity – several moments of realizing our interconnectedness, and the fact that we are all loved, all valuable, all cared for
- Several moments I think John the Baptist and Luke the Evangelist would be proud of
- Because in this season, as our King and Savior now draws near, that is, I think, what is asked of us
- To proclaim the good tidings of great joy that we're preparing to celebrate

- To connect with each other, to share the joy and the love and the greatness of God
- To share the miracle that God was made flesh and walked among us
- And to rejoice that as we await the presence of Christ in a manger, we can still see the face of Christ in one another
- To share with the world the bountiful grace and mercy that God has shown us, and the joy that brings us all this season