**December 12, 2021 Luke 3:7-18**

***Joy***

**Scripture:** *Luke 3:7-18 NRSV*

*(7)John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (8)Bear fruits worthy of repentance. 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. (9)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.” (10)And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” (11)In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” (12)Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” (13)He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” (14)Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.” (15)As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, (16)John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (17)His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” (18)So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.*

**Notes:**

1. The way of joy begins with ***repentance*.**
   1. Joy is a ***reorientation*** and ***transformation*** of one’s life.
   2. Children of God produce fruit of ***justice*** and ***compassion***,
   3. The call to repentance also points to a family being created by ***Jesus*** through the ***church***.
2. “What should we do?” The answer to this question can help us find ***joy***.
   1. ***Generosity*** is a key component to this new life in Christ.
   2. ***Greed*** has no place in this new life.
   3. A life that is ***transformed***, is one of contentment, generosity, kindness, compassion, and justice.
   4. One of the consequences of a transformed life is ***joy***.
3. Jesus is the ultimate way to the good news of joy for ***all*** ***people***.
   1. John pointed them to the true ***Messiah***.
   2. The ultimate good news was the coming of ***Christ***.
   3. The real, living, breathing Good News was ***Jesus***.
4. We know that ***Christ*** has come.
   1. The good news of Christ is that we can have ***joy*** even now.
   2. Joy is a deep and abiding state brought on by our ***connection*** with ***Christ***.
   3. ***Christ*** has truly ***brought*** ***joy*** to this kingdom

**Script:**

The Third Week of Advent, sometimes we think we can blink and the whole advent season as well as the Christmas season is in the past and we hardly had a chance to enjoy the joy of the season. This week we focus on this Joy. We sings song during this time of year that celebrate this sentiment; songs like How Great our Joy, Joyful Joyful We Adore You, and one of my favorites Joy to the World. So it feels appropriate that we would read a text from scripture that speaks of said Joy.

Our Text this morning begins with John the Baptist referring to his followers as a brood of vipers, the offspring of snakes. To me that doesn’t sound very joyful. But upon closer examination, and reading the passage in context, perhaps it is. We have a tendency to define joy through rose colored glasses; seeing only the very best of what joy is. We see it as a happiness that shines with glitter and light. But maybe joy is something deeper than that. Maybe it is something that goes beyond a momentary feeling of happiness, to a deeply rooted sense of identity.

Last week we dove a bit into Luke 3 and talked about how it connects with peace in our lives and the world, and that is an important place to start because, in much the same way that hope, peace, and joy go together on the Advent wreath, they are also very much linked together in our lives and in the kingdom of God that is about to burst onto the scene. Stand with me as we share in the reading of our passage for today, Luke 3:7-18.

*(7)John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (8)Bear fruits worthy of repentance. 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. (9)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.” (10)And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” (11)In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” (12)Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” (13)He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” (14)Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.” (15)As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, (16)John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (17)His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” (18)So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. Luke 3:7-18 NRSV*

**THE WAY OF JOY BEGINS WITH REPENTANCE**

John’s harsh words are a call to repentance. We often think of repentance as saying, “I’m sorry,” but the Greek word *metanoia* means more than that. It is about seeing things in a new way. It is a complete reorientation and transformation of one’s life. John is criticizing the ways they have depended on their heritage to save them. They cry out about being the children of Abraham, as though their ancestry will save them because they are God’s chosen people. But John is telling them that God has called God’s people to something more. The fruit they are producing is not fruit that the children of God would or should produce. The children of God produce the fruit of justice and compassion, as we see John explain to them in verses 11–14. The trees that are not producing good fruit are going to be cut down: there is to be a transformation in the lives of those who follow God.

The call to repentance also points to the new family being created by Jesus through the church—one that is not based on heritage, gender, race, or background but rather on repentance and a life lived following after him. This is a family created through the waters of baptism, not through the old-covenant ways of circumcision and bloodline.

There’s a contrast here in Luke 3 between the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of God breaking into the world through Jesus, like we talked about last week, but it is also about a new family being formed.

**THE PEOPLE ARE LEFT WITH THE QUESTION, “WHAT SHOULD WE DO?” THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION CAN HELP US FIND JOY**

Verse 11: “Whoever has two shirts must share with the one who has none, and whoever has food must do the same.” Generosity is a key component to this new life of following Christ. In Matthew 25, we see Jesus preaching the same call to generosity in his parable of the sheep and goats. In this new life, those who have give to those who don’t. This is part of the reorientation process through repentance. Where the focus seems to have been on how to save themselves (verse 8) they are to now be focused on the well-being of others.

Verse 13: “Collect no more than you are authorized to collect.” Greed has no place in this new life. Tax collectors were notorious for taking more than they were supposed to and pocketing the excess. This call isn’t the same as the call to generosity in the preceding verses, but it embodies the same spirit. Coveting and taking from others is not part of this new life.

There is another important reorientation here as well. Tax collectors were often hated, but this response seems to say that they are still welcomed into this new life. They are never asked to no longer be tax collectors, though maybe they would lose their jobs if they became honest and righteous. They are called to the same standard of repentance and new life, and to live a new way in the occupation they practice. The way they exist in the world changes, which in turn changes how they do their job and relate to the people around them.

Verse 14: “Don’t cheat or harass anyone, and be satisfied with your pay.” This is a call to be kind and to be content. The soldiers were the military arm of the Roman Empire. They were the ones with the power. They could have easily harassed and cheated people without repercussions. They could have done even worse! Yet John called them to something noticeably different. These soldiers are also called to contentment with their financial standing, which seems to elaborate even further on how one should view material possessions. We started with “be generous,” followed by “don’t be greedy,” and now we’re ending with “be content.”

The expectation is that a life that is transformed—a life that bears good fruit—is one of contentment, generosity, kindness, compassion, and justice. When we look at studies on happiness, one of the common themes for many people is the idea of contentment and generosity. This is not just confined to what John the Baptist said but can also be seen in the lives of people alive today.

When we live a transformed life that bears good fruit, one of the consequences is joy. We receive joy when we help others, and when we aren’t constantly desiring more, and when we have compassion toward others. The language about bearing fruit here is echoed by Paul in Galatians 5 when he names the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Lives that are transformed by the Spirit bear the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

**JESUS IS THE ULTIMATE WAY TO THE GOOD NEWS OF JOY FOR ALL PEOPLE**

The people began looking at John with the expectation that he might be the Messiah because his words were transformative, and he called people to something more and greater than they’d known before. But John pointed them to the true Messiah, Jesus, telling them that he was merely the one preparing a way. He used the image of baptism to explain that, while they may have felt transformed and empowered by the water, the one who was coming would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. John used imagery from the Old Testament in reference to the day of the Lord to talk about how Jesus would bring the kingdom of God crashing to earth in powerful ways.

The last words of the text for the week are: “With many other words John appealed to them, proclaiming good news to the people.” The ultimate good news was the coming of Christ. Christ would bring about a new order of things, would show them how to be generous, compassionate, and content, and would show them how to give up their greed and act justly toward others. John was only the one preparing the way. The real, living, breathing Good News was Jesus—Immanuel, God-with-us—coming into the world.

We live in this space of the already/not-yet kingdom of God. We know that Christ has come. We know that God put on flesh and came to be among us, ushering in a new way of life, a new family, a new kingdom—yet we see brokenness around us. We walk into weeks like this one, where the theme is joy, and wonder if joy is even available to us. It’s hard to have joy in the midst of despair. It’s hard to have joy in this in-between time, this time of preparation. During Advent we pray for God to draw close, and the good news of Christ is that we can have joy even now.

Joy isn’t merely a feeling brought about by circumstances; it is a deep and abiding state brought on by our connection with Christ. It’s not passive but is fostered through the ways that our lives are continually transformed to look more like Jesus. When we lay aside our discontent, when we share with others, and when we find ways to seek justice and compassion in the world, then we find these profound moments of joy that we can’t help but share with the world around us.

And so we declare, “Joy to the world! The Lord has come! Let earth receive her King! Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing!”—because Christ has truly brought joy in this kingdom that is breaking through even now, through and in us.