

Trinitarian Congregational Church
TakeOut
December 12, 2021

Bells

Announcements

Prelude

Call to Worship Advent Candle Lighting (from Quentin Chin)

Isaiah 12:2-6

Gwen Trelle

Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the LORD GOD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth. Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

Response:

O Key of David and scepter of Israel: You open and no one shall shut;
you shut and no one shall open.

Come and release from the prison house those who sit in darkness, in the shadow of death.

O Dawn from on high, splendor of God's light and sun of justice:

Come and enlighten those who sit in darkness, in the shadow of death.

Hymn Response: O Come, O Come Emmanuel

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer, Our spirits by thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel, Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Gathering Prayer

Gwen Trelle

O God, our strength and shield, we sing aloud and rejoice in your goodness and grace. We have come together in faith to draw water from the well of our salvation. We have come to be cleansed and made whole. We have come to be restored through the refining fire of your Spirit. We have come that our lives may be a witness to your transforming power in Christ. Amen.

Gloria Patri

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, reign without end. Amen, amen.

Scripture

Zephaniah lived as a prophet during the reign of King Josiah (640-609 BC). His was the first prophetic voice since the time of Isaiah and Jeremiah. The message he brought from God was radical and universal in scope – the great Day of the Lord was about the break over all creation. This reading probably came late in Zephaniah’s ministry. Having warned God’s people of judgement, he also offers them hope in God’s restoration.

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Gwen Trelle

¹⁴ Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! ¹⁵ The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more.

¹⁶ On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. ¹⁷ The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing ¹⁸ as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. ¹⁹ I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. ²⁰ At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.

Today’s reading is a continuation from last week. In this section Luke focuses on the people’s response to John’s message. Three groups ask for guidance and John ties ‘bearing good fruit’ with social responsibility appropriate to each person. As anticipation for ‘the day of the Lord’ increases among his listeners, John again clarifies his role as Christ’s forerunner.

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.

Special Music

Sermon

When a Prophet Pleas

How do you respond when someone calls you on the carpet? Does it depend on how they speak to you? It does for me. Probably like most of you I can hear you best when you approach me without rancor. Yell and I will shut down, and by the way, I will probably write you off. Sorry, but true.

So, I have a really hard time with John's message today. Do you? My imagination has him screaming like a banshee. Vipers, slithering snakes, who told you... and on and on. But here's the thing that really bugs me. His audience ate it up! They didn't run away, fight back or take cover. Why in the world would anyone put up with John? Yet they did.

And I have to wonder, if behind the assumed vitriol I project on him, in reality John may have been pleading more than condemning. John didn't stop with 'offspring of serpents' and write the people off. He kept on going... 'bear fruit worthy of repentance'. First, John says, repent. Turn again, turn back to God and God's ways. All is not lost; you are not forever damned. God's lovingkindness and mercy, God's forgiveness is just waiting on you. That was the whole message for John "he came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." (Luke 3:3)

I think behind John's yelling was a broken, pleading heart. John saw God's profound love and compassion; and so, wanted his people, all people, to find that life-transforming grace. John called for them to repent, to turn again toward God, not with a mealy-mouthed 'sorry', but with an actual desire for God's life-altering mercy. That is why he was so adamant that those who came for baptism actually bore the fruit of repentance.

It was not enough that his listeners had be born Jews (with Abraham as their ancestral father). Claiming the promise given to Abraham without the faith of Abraham was meaningless and useless. That is true whether we are claiming our place through the church, family, social status, prestige or power. Like Paul, without faith it's all trash. (Phil 3:4-8) John strips away the most important claim of his listeners and says "Nope. That won't do. You need to truly repent and by that, I mean live a repentant life. Bear its fruit."

Now, to many of us, that seems like a terrifying proposition. 'Oh no, God wants me to toss everything.' And yet, when the crowds asked John 'How, how do we bear fruit? What should we do?'" John had the most simple, basic, almost banal answers. 'If you have two coats give one to the person without any'. To the tax collectors he said 'Don't take more that is legal'. And to the soldiers 'Don't threaten or oppress others.' Make a fair living. Those all seem like obvious, upright behaviors. But that is the point of turning and living according to God's ways. It's not about the fantastic and heroic. Rather it's really all about how we are living out our love for God and our neighbor.

Now those are all good words; God loves you and wants to forgive you, open yourselves to God's mercy and live then in God's way of love – in the simple life of doing what is good and right towards each other. And we would be happy to stop right there. But not for John. John isn't done. Why? Because if John's call and instructions were the end of the story, people would leave the wilderness with little more than wet hair, a good word and a to-do list. But that could, and cannot, sustain anyone in a life fully lived for God. So far, such a call would only be 'pull yourself up by your own boot straps' – and that hasn't worked since the days of Adam and Eve.

Even though the crowd may have desperately wanted John to be their guru, John wouldn't have it. Instead of calling the crowd to yet another form of self-help, John directs them to the true source of new life; the one who is coming, God's promised One. He is greater than John, and his work is more powerful than John's. His baptism doesn't just get you wet, it sets you on fire, it fills you with God's Spirit. The Christ will bring to us the gift of God's full salvation, the very breath and power of God that changes all of life.

That is the vision and promise and hope that so stirred John. It was the catalyst that charged the prophets plea. And it was the incitement that led the crowds to hear him gladly and to receive his cry as good news. Can we do the same? Amen.

***Hymn** Comfort, Comfort O My People NCH 101 vs 1,2

Joys and Concerns

Prayers of the People

Holy God, we come to you today awed by your holiness and love. We thank you for the words of judgement that hold within them the promise of your mercy. We thank you for all who courageously speak your truth even when we find it hard to accept. We thank you for your endless call to repent and for the inexhaustible power of your renewal. We thank you for all you have accomplished for us in Christ and for all you are doing in us through his Spirit. O God, we want to live as your faithful people and so we come to you now seeking your power and guidance.

We pray for your church and for this congregation. Open our ear and hearts to accept all your words and to allow our lives to be transformed according to your will. May we bear the good fruit of your gospel in service to your world.

We pray for our world and all its leaders. May they hear the truth spoken to them on behalf of all the forsaken and suffering. And may they seek to establish your true ways of justice and peace for all peoples. We pray also for all who are in need today. Grant your healing to the ill, your comfort to the sorrowful, and your provision to the needy. We especially pray for... and we thank you for...

We praise you and thank you, Merciful god, for all your goodness to us, through Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Choral Response Remember Me

Offering

God's message rings clear through the ages. We are called to bear the fruit of repentance, not for ourselves, but for the welfare of all people. Through our gifts and service, we make known the true power of gospel. Let us dedicate our offerings in joy and hope.

We thank you, O God, for the power of your salvation. You are the Holy One who comes not only to judge, but also to heal and renew and restore. Having received such mercy from you we in turn want to make your goodness known to all our neighbors, through words of truth and deeds of love. May these gifts bear the fruit of your salvation, to the glory of Christ. Amen.

Doxology (choose the one that is best for your faith)

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise him all creatures here below,
praise him above ye heavenly hosts, praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise God all creatures here below
Praise God for all that Love has done; Creator, Christ and Spirit One. Amen

*Hymn O How Shall I Receive You NCH 102 vs 1,3

*Common Commission

Let us go forth into the world in peace, being of good courage, holding fast to that which is good, rendering to no one evil for evil, strengthening the faint-hearted, supporting the weak, helping the afflicted, honoring all persons, loving and serving the Lord, and rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Benediction

Go now into the world

And may you be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to God, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. Colossians 1:9b-10

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Postlude

music provided by Chris Harris and Lynne Walker