

Third Sunday of Advent - C 2018
Zephaniah 3.14-18a // Philippians 4.4-7 // Luke 3.10-18

→two young brothers got to spend the night with their grandparents right before Christmas.

→at bedtime, the two boys knelt beside their bed to say their prayers when the older brother began praying at the top of his lungs: “Dear God, I need a new bicycle for Christmas this year.”

→after repeating this three or four times, his younger brother leaned over and said... “you don’t have to shout, God isn’t deaf.”

→to which the older brother replied: “no, but Grandma is!”

Our readings today tell us to rejoice, to be glad – even in the midst of extreme suffering and discouragement

→and for some that might be a tall order given the circumstances of life these days...however as we look towards Christmas it truly is a time for us to rejoice, to be glad and to have hearts full of hope and joy.

→and one of the ways we accomplish this is through our expressions of care and concern for one another...

→and perhaps at no other time of year then right now...are those expressions most present and meaningful

→you know one of the more often asked questions at this time of year is... “what do you want for Christmas?”

→...followed by...in a couple of weeks...by another common question...“what did you get for Christmas?”

→well in today's gospel the people are also asking a different but similar question of John the Baptist.....they ask John... “what should we do?”... “what ought we be doing?”

→[as we see] the people realized that John was someone special with a special message and so they wanted to know what they should be doing to get ready for the coming of the Messiah...

→the people and tax collectors...and even the soldiers all ask him the same question.... “what should we do?”...to which he gives some pretty bold and startling answers...answers that [I believe] also speak to you and me today as well

→“what should we be doing” they ask...and he answers by saying.... **“be satisfied with your wages”**

→now.....that's a pretty strange answer when you think about it...but you see...in those days...there weren't unions or pensions or insurance, there weren't banks or interest or labor agreements

→in those days...*people's worth was measured by what they did for each other rather than by what they had.....*

→today it is just the opposite...[today] we unfortunately measure the worth of people by what they have rather than by what they do

→i.o.w....we judge people today by how many millions they have or are making rather than by what people are doing

→and so, I think John's message to us today is basically this... “be content with what you have”

→let's face it...we are all living pretty comfortable lives when you think about it...we all have homes, and clothes and food on our tables...and yet there is always a strong desire...in all of us...to always want more...

→and it is **to that** strong desire...that John is speaks today

→i.o.w...perhaps the real Christmas challenge is for us to focus on what we have rather than on what we are going to get...or what we want

→next they ask.... "what should we be doing?" ... and John answers by saying...

"do not practice extortion or accuse anyone falsely"

→...i.o.w. don't be a bully

→back then bullies carried sticks and small knives, maybe swords and spears.....we have knives today as well...but we also have bombs, guns and grenades...the weapons may have changed but the idea remains the same

→what I think John is saying to you and me today....is that we also shouldn't bully anyone either...now most of us aren't bullies in the physical sense...but at times we can bully one another with our words or our attitudes

→we can overpower each other emotionally and spiritually and mentally...and we often violate each other by our gossip and anger, our jealousy and greed...

→and so perhaps that is what John means for us...when he says do not practice extortion...i.o.w. don't take advantage of others

--and finally...what should we be doing" they ask...and John answers...

"share your coats...share what you have with those who are in need"

→in essence, John's answer is the root of the Christian way of life...it is a task and a challenge that all of us are continually called to...to take care and watch out for one another.

PAUSE

→[and so] what *should* we be doing...well if John the Baptist were standing here today...perhaps he would say

--we should be preparing ourselves for the time of Christ

--we should be reconciling with those to whom we have been estranged

--we should be patient to those to whom we have been abrupt

--give understanding to those to whom we have been confused

--and embracing God's mercy and sharing it with one another....

→we should be waiting with hearts full of hope and joy

PAUSE

→so....what do you want for Christmas....

...and in a few day...that question will change to "what did you get for Christmas?"

→wouldn't it be nice if the answer to both those questions this year...were the exactly the same..... "I want and got the love of Christ for Christmas this year and shared it with others"

I want and got.....a heart full of hope and joy.....