**12/15/24**

**What Should We Do?**

**Vicar Vince Piekarski**

**Luke 3:7-18 (NRSVUE)**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSVUE) (2) **Amen.**

Welcome back to the party folks! Now, What Should We Do? I mean we are halfway through this season of Advent already! Can you believe that? We have now lit the third candle on our Advent Wreath! Will this birthday month and all our preparation and our waiting really to turn into that holy expectation and hope that we expect as we encounter the Christ Child following His glorious and amazing birth? As we join one another at 6PM to celebrate our Christmas Eve Service together just a few short days from now will we yet again see the very answer to this question? Will we emerge out of the dark singing Silent Night together with all of our visitors and family and friends in this beautiful candlelit sanctuary with a sense of hope for the coming year? Will we include everyone like our Gospel Reading from Luke offers us these past two weeks and ensure those of us on the conference call at home will have candles ready to light as well? I hope that we will all be singing along proclaiming this very birth and having that light not just in front of us, but in our hearts too, as we have this beautiful experience together.

Folks, I really do mean it when I say thank you all for joining us here in the pews and out there on the conference call. It really is important that we continue to gather together to learn and talk about all that is going on in scripture and even in our lives. This very community is vital to the church, but it is vital to each and every one of us as well. It is also vital to God, for he desires us to be together to strengthen and care for one another. With that being said, I am also thankful to head up to Brookdale again today in order to spend some time with that part of the community up there while True Deliverance Praise & Worship Center is here worshipping together in this very space. What a beautiful mixture of believers we have between all of these various faith communities. It is cool to see how we all care for one another, pray for one another, and support one another in various ways. It is interesting how we all continue to hunger for the Word and that togetherness that Christ brings to all of us of the faith no matter where we are, or even what time or banner we worship under.

As I told you last week, we are going to learn a little more about John and how he paved the way for his cousin, Jesus. Now, don’t tell me I did not forewarn you about some of those very harsh words we heard today in our Gospel Reading. John is really the epitome of what a Minister is called to preach about, and that is law and gospel. With that very mindset I would be led to believe that John caught everyone’s attention back then, just as he has done so now. If you think about it, he is in the very sandals of a parent that you don’t want to mess with. John is being caring and loving while watching out for the church, but he is not doing so in a fluffy and snuggly way that we all too often would prefer. He guards all of us in a more direct manner with his words as if we were his children. John is indeed a concerned church father wanting to wake people up and ensure that each and every one of us is on the correct path to salvation. We were also ensured of that last week as the very last verse in our Gospel Reading stated that “all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’” (2) (Luke 3:6) John was not only preaching, teaching, and caring for the people back then, but us in the here and now as well. How awesome is that? What I find even more amazing is that today’s story from the Gospel of Luke even gives us a little more to chew on than some of the other gospel lessons we get during this time of year in our other two lectionary cycles. Thank goodness for John the Baptizer and all of his work, and thank goodness for all of the accounts written in the Bible so we really do get a true picture of things! That is even if it is a little harsh or rude at times.

So, let’s really break down today’s reading, because I assure you in its strong and weighted nature you may have missed a few words or concepts just like I did on the first and second read through. There really is a lot in these verses, and it is quite easy to glance right over some of it or even miss the point of a few things because our feelings may have been hurt temporarily. I can honestly admit that each time I read it over I found something else, or I saw a different point that John was trying to get at. His law and gospel approach really does have several layers. What Should We Do? Is heard several times, but also answered in great detail. So, let’s take a little different approach and crack at things here today and really unpack things by breaking them down verse by verse, or paragraph by paragraph.

Well of course John starting out by calling us all a brood of vipers is not really how any minister would get into a pulpit and preach nowadays. I am quite sure a few of you might have even got up and walked out the door if I came at you so directly with my sermon. After all we are not in the wilderness; we are in church. We actually chose to come or call in here, and we for sure did not ask to be called any names. Then, as if John’s first few words were not enough to frustrate or anger us John may have even pushed us closer towards the exit as he continues on and even asks us who warned us of the very wrath or punishment coming. At that very point many of you may quite honestly had been questioning how in the heck we were going to even get to the good news at this point. I mean we have already been called a deadly group of snakes that is not to know we are in trouble. However, John still does not lighten up with his approach. He continues on and promotes us getting to work, as if he is calling us lazy or something. With this John does not just expect us to do any kind of work either, but he expects us to roll up our sleeves and do that Kingdom work that bears good fruit. He continues this proverbial teardown before the rebuild by telling us not to be complacent and just count on our family lineage and the very efforts of those that have gone on before us to protect us. That brings to mind where we have definitely heard of or been cautioned about cheap grace before folks, as John echoes that we are called to be Christlike and love our neighbor, and that is how we do the work and bear this fruit that is spoken of. Then, as if this is all not enough, John tells us that if we do not listen or do right by God then he can just discard us into the fire and create new out of a few stones. Talk about another smack in the face! He just does not end there though; John even gives us the image of an ax laying at the foot of the tree. With this he confirms that it is simple to just cut us down and throw us into the fire. After all that direct tongue lashing and name calling, and all that putting us in our place, John really expects us to hang out a little bit longer and to listen to a little bit more. After all John is not just baptizing the people in the wilderness just because they showed up, and he is not just allowing for our baptisms because we have shown up either. He is ensuring we all are indeed ready and take the message and love of Christ to heart. This is precisely where you might think to yourself that you were baptized as a child, but that is why you had family and sponsors stand in and be ready until you were ready to take on that responsibility and promise on your own. That is precisely why we are reminded of our very baptism in the liturgy each week as well.

Alright, let’s move on to the next set of verses or paragraph here. So, if you have not tucked tail, or even walked away grumbling by now, then here is more of the message John was delivering. This is where I mentioned that we get a little more of the picture with this particular Gospel Reading in Lectionary Year C. We actually get to hear from everyone present as the same question is heard three times from quite a differing group of folks. Although, some pretty plain answers line up with what we heard about before regarding that Kingdom Work and Bearing Good Fruit as our Calling for sure. To put it plain and simple as we continue on in this living Word, as characters in this very story, we are told to share, and not just keep things to ourselves. We are told not to take advantage of anyone, and treat people with respect. We are told not to bully or be rude to people. To top it all off, we are told to be appreciative or thankful. We are and have been the very people in the sandals of the crowd, we also have been the Tax Collector, and we also have been the Soldiers at one point or another in our lives. That is precisely why this message is for all of us now, and not just the people back then.

Now, that John has lightened up with his approach a bit, and has even given us all a few guiding steps, I venture we all have been set at ease some. As we move onto the next set of verses or paragraph, I am sure we all would really appreciate an apology of some kind, but we will take what we can get. We know what to do now, and because of those crass remarks and directions why don’t we double check if this guy is the Messiah. I mean I am not all too sure why we did not do that in the first place, but okay. He confirms that after giving us that proverbial one-two punch earlier, and then embracing us and giving us some direction, that someone even more powerful than him is coming. He even informs us that he is not worthy to untie his sandals. How in the world did we just manage to take all that from John the Baptizer, and then be told someone else is coming even stronger and greater? He goes on to further confirm that this person will baptize in a different manner and a more miraculous way, and that he will have more support with him too. He confirms this person will gather us into his arms, and ensure that none of us is missed as he weeds out all that should not be present with his winnowing fork. He even confirms that this second fire we hear about today will be one of refining, and it will be one of cleansing just like the very waters of baptism. This is precisely why John was so rough with us to start as he wanted to ensure that we were not just focusing on belief or trust. He was indeed challenging all of us his to a right relationship with God and our neighbors as well.

So, we end things off as we hear in verse 18, “So with many other exhortations he proclaimed the good news to the people.” Yes, he really urged us to change our focus, to change our life, and not to fall into the pit of regret or denial. Yes, he really got us motivated to go out there and do some good stuff and not just talk about it. Yes, John really showed us the caring love of a parent, but also reminded us that we humans can do nothing on our own and need to turn towards God for everything. Yes, he confirmed that Christ was coming yet again and would collect all of us back into the fold and weed out everything and anything that gets in the way. What a blessed reassurance here folks! What a way to tear apart a message that at first really seemed to aggravate us or even discourage us. That is the very power of wrestling with the text and actually breaking it down together. That is the very power of studying and coming together to support one another. For we all need to support and love on one another. For we know there is indeed greater things coming despite what we see right in front of us. Let us continue on in our time of preparation during this time of Advent. Let us continue on in our time of preparation during the rest of the year as well. Let us no longer question What Should We Do, but follow the very words and guidance of John the Baptizer that we have heard these last two weeks. Let us continue on in the very expectation that better and brighter things are to come when Christ returns yet again on the clouds. Our Savior will be born unto us again this Christmas, but He will also come back yet again for you and for I because He has guaranteed it, and He desires to love on each and every one of us now, forever, and always in eternity!

**Amen.**

**References & Study Points**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

 Preaching

 Year C 2025

 December 15th, 2024

 3rd Sunday of Advent

(2) BibleGateway.com

(3) The Four Pages of The Sermon

 Revised and Updated

 A Guide to Biblical Preaching

 Paul Scott Wilson

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 Abingdon Press

(4) WorkingPreacher.org

 Third Sunday of Advent

 Tangible examples of what repentance looks like

 December 15, 2024

 Commentary on Luke 3:7-18

 Troy Troftgruben

(5) WorkingPreacher.org

 Third Sunday of Advent

 Repentance is lived out in the everyday practices of life

 December 12, 2021

 Commentary on Luke 3:7-18

 Audrey West

(6) WorkingPreacher.org

 Third Sunday of Advent (Year C)

 In last Sunday’s Gospel reading, John the Baptist issued a ringing call to prepare the

 way for the Lord.

 December 13, 2015

 Commentary on Luke 3:7-18

 Judith Jones

(7) WorkingPreacher.org

 Third Sunday of Advent (Year C)

 The reading from Luke for this week follows on the heels of the summary of John’s

 preaching of a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,” and the claim that

 his proclamation, which sets the table for the arrival of Jesus, was what Isaiah

 promised centuries prior.

 December 16, 2012

 Commentary on Luke 3:7-18

 Karl Jacobson

(8) WorkingPreacher.org

 Third Sunday of Advent (Year C)

 It would appear, according to Luke, that John is an “old school” preacher, delivering

 in these verses a sermon composed of “three points and a poem.”

 December 13, 2009

 Commentary on Luke 3:7-18

 David Lose

(9) SermonCentral.com

 God Works In The World

 Contributed by Tim Zingale on Dec 4, 2000

 Scripture: Luke 3:7-18

 Denomination: Lutheran

(10) SermonCentral.com

 The Promised One Is Coming! Series

 Contributed by Maurice Schaus on Dec 24, 2003

 Scripture: Luke 3:7-18, Philippians 4:4-7

 Denomination: Lutheran

**Luke 3:7-18 (NRSVUE)**

 John the Baptist heralds the mighty one who is coming. John teaches that

 preparation for God’s reign is not a matter of identity but of bearing fruits of

 merciful justice, radical generosity, and vocational integrity.

 7 John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers!

 Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Therefore, bear fruits worthy of

 repentance, and 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; therefore every tree

 that does not bear good fruit will be 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 strap 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.