

Daily Discipleship

Third Sunday of Advent – Luke 3:7-18

Imperatives of Discipleship – *Bear Fruit!*

Focus Question: What does it mean to bear fruit during this Advent season?

word of life

“Bear fruits worthy of repentance.” Luke 3:8 (NRSV)

Read Luke 3:7-18

Once again this week, we are confronted by John the Baptist. In last Sunday’s gospel, we heard the call from John the Baptist to repentance. This week, we hear from John the implications of repentance for our daily lives.

1. *What difference does repentance make?*

There are three points (as some say every good sermon should have) in John’s message:

the announcement of God’s coming and the call to repent

the implications of repentance

the imminent coming of the Messiah and what his message will be like.

The Call to Repent

The first words we hear from John to those who came to be baptized by him are certainly not inviting words of comfort but rather of challenge and admonition. Calling your audience a “brood of vipers” (vs. 7) is certainly a challenging way to begin! Neither religious ritual (the crowds coming out to John to receive a baptism of repentance in vs. 7), nor ethnic or religious heritage – “we have Abraham as our ancestor” (vs. 8) – are of ultimate importance in preparation for God’s coming. We might know the liturgy from memory, and our family might be good German Lutherans for generations. But if our lives don’t reflect what our lips and faith confess, are we truly prepared? Repentance calls for fruits which reflect a changed heart.

2. *In what ways does John’s message comfort you?*

3. *In what ways does it challenge you?*

The Implications of Repentance

The crowd’s reaction to John’s challenging message is a refreshing one: “What then shall we do?” They were apparently sincere in their repentance and wanted to “be fruitful” and do the right thing. John responds to their question with concrete acts of justice and mercy which can be done in their daily lives. To the common crowd, he calls for those who *have* to give to those who *have not*. Even to the despised tax collectors and the mercenary soldiers who protected them, he calls for just actions and right relationships with others.

4. *How can you “bear fruits that are worthy of repentance” in your daily lives?*

The Imminent Coming and Message of the Messiah

The people who see and hear John know of the promise of the Messiah who would usher in an age of justice, righteousness, and peace. John’s message seems to fit. The people are filled with expectation (vs. 15). Could this be the Messiah?

John responds to their expectations by pointing to the one who is yet to come. Note the change in his message. “Bearing fruit worthy of repentance” (vs. 8) becomes “I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals” (vs. 16). In the end, it is God who makes us worthy. In baptism, God’s Spirit cleanses us, refines us, and makes us worthy and able to bear fruit.

5. *How is John the Baptist’s message “good news” for the people (and for us)?*

word among us

Someone's coming! What wonderful news! Someone's coming! But I'm not ready!

Parties and visitors are often a part of the holiday season. It is not uncommon to have house guests and family members staying in our homes. There is so much to do to be prepared for guests who are coming. Food needs to be bought and prepared. The house needs to be cleaned and dusted. Decorations need to be brought down from the attic and arranged. We want our house and our table to look their best. We want everything to be perfect!

1. *What are other things we do to prepare for guests?*

But how do we prepare ourselves? What can we do to make our guests feel important to us? What can we do to indicate to those soon to be arriving that we are excited and glad that they are coming? Our homes can be spic and span clean with all the right decorations, but if our words and actions are not welcoming, will our guests feel "at home"?

In this Advent season, we hear the message of John the Baptist heralding the coming of someone important and calling for preparation and repentance. His words are filled with hope and expectation ... and challenge. Are we ready for Christ's coming?

2. *How do we prepare for Christ's coming into our lives?*

John the Baptist reminds us that our lives should reflect the desire to change and to be ready in our hearts for Christ to come. The words of a well-known hymn put it this way:

*For not with swords loud clashing, nor roll of stirring drums,
But deeds of love and mercy, the heavenly kingdom comes.
("Lead on, O King Eternal" Evangelical Lutheran Worship #805)*

Our actions, words, and care for others are the fruits of our true preparation for God to come into our lives. But if we are truly honest with ourselves and with God, we must confess that we are never truly ready. Our spiritual homes will never be completely clean through our own efforts. Our fruit will never come to full ripeness. On our own, we can never be truly worthy for God to enter into our lives. We know the truth of John the Baptist's words: "One who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal (vs. 16)." On our own, we are never ready.

The good news is that even though we are not ready, God comes still. And in the end, God readies us – forgiving us and cleansing our hearts. The guest becomes the host, and we are welcomed at the table which has been prepared for us. And so we can dare to pray: "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus and be our guest!"

3. *How do you hope to bear fruit in the coming week?*

4. *What does it mean for you to be welcomed at the table of Holy Communion?*

Prayer

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Cleanse and prepare us, so that we might reflect your coming in all we say and do. Amen

Dig Deeper

Philippians 4:4-9

last word

This week, do something that reflects Christ's coming into your life.



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Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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