

## **Take Home Worship – Sunday Dec 6, 2020 – Advent 2**

By Rev. Julie Lebrun - Inlet United Church, Port Moody BC

### **Opening Prayer**

God of the Advent season,  
we rejoice in your presence  
this second week of Advent  
we recall this past week  
the signs of Hope  
that woke the hope deep within us  
glimpses of hope emerging from questions  
glimmers of hope emerging from shadows.  
Holy One,  
We open ourselves to signs of Peace  
in unexpected places.  
We open our hearts and minds  
to prepare the way for peace  
prepare the way of Christ  
born anew in us. Amen

### **Scriptures: Luke 3:1-15**

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.  
Every valley shall be filled,  
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,  
and the crooked shall be made straight,  
and the rough ways made smooth;  
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

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? 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. 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.”

And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." 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."

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah.

### **Prayer**

God of Peace, May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be touched by your loving spirit. Amen

### **Reflection**

This is the second Sunday of Advent, the 4 Sundays leading up to Christmas. The celebration of Jesus' birth. God become flesh, Emmanuel God among us.

Peace Sunday, yet this reading seems anything but peaceful!

Crowds are coming out to be baptized by John.

(He did the baptising before Jesus)

It's John's job to prepare the way for real Messiah...Jesus...anointed one.

John greets them as a "brood of vipers!" and a family of snakes!

Not my usual welcome when families come to our congregations for baptism.

He is really giving it to them.

Bear fruits worthy of repentance...even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down.

Ouch...that is hard to take... especially with our vision of Inlet United being a tree...rooted in our Christian Tradition.

I don't know about you?

But I really don't like being threatened.

And I don't think it motivates people to change and engage in the world in helpful ways.

During this time of Covid I'm more motivated to follow restrictions with Dr Bonnie Henry's approach to education about the virus over Ontario Premier Doug Ford's threatening approach to what he might do when people don't follow the rules.

But this threatening approach seems to be John's approach. Maybe he missed the course on harassment in the workplace.

Today we read Luke's version. In Matthew's version of this story John speaks only to the scribes and the Pharisees. So it's easy to say, John is not speaking to me. I can let the scribes and Pharisees turn around (repent means turn around) and figure out how to bring God's dream of peace and shalom into the world.

In Luke's version John speaks to everyone, the whole crowd and that includes you and me, all of us today. Maybe that's why his approach bugs me. It is ok for John to intimidate scribes and Pharisees but not everyday us. What did I do?! What didn't I do?!

And yet, I have to pause and think.

If we are God's people, to participate in God's kin-dom / Kingdom, peace for all, what does that look like?

This week, I find I am constantly turning from the sophisticated methods of advertising and consumerism

Christmas shopping...Black Friday...this new day for shopping.

Pop ups on my computer suggesting what I would like to buy.

The media around me tells me I can be satisfied and fulfilled with the more stuff I can buy...and yet deep down I know that's not true...

Repent means to turn towards God, toward Spirit, towards life<sup>3</sup>

Turn away from false God's.

With the hurts of the world today...global pandemic of Covid, racial inequity, violence, poverty, loneliness.

...it can all seem overwhelming...

...eating chocolate and some retail therapy sounds like good salvation to me!

And besides John is not being helpful in telling me what to do. Just what will happen if I don't produce good fruit. And the outcome doesn't sound good!

Fortunately, the crowds John is speaking to are more patient than I...and perhaps you. They ask the question "What then shall we do?"

I am so glad they have the patience to ask the question...What then shall we do?

Each group that asked the question is given a different answer.

-The crowds (common everyday people) are told to share their food and to share their belongings. If you have 2 coats, share with someone who has none. Meet your needs, don't exceed them. Not a message that supports the shopping of Black Friday.

-The tax collectors are told to be honest in their work and not collect more than they're supposed to.

-The soldiers are told to be satisfied with their pay and not extort money...don't abuse your power...be honest in your work.

He does not tell them to solve all the world's problems. He does not tell them they need to be all things to all people. He suggests an appropriate action to their circumstances. He doesn't say we have to do it all...but he does say we have to do something.

Do what you can  
With what you have  
Trusting that it is enough

God's dream of Peace and shalom of all the world is not just for a chosen few. By definition shalom is realized when experienced by all...when everyone has what they need; shelter, food, medical help, belonging, safety, purpose. And in our actions we become part of what God is doing in the world...healing...where healing is needed. We need God's limitless imagination beyond our imagination and God needs us to do what we can in our own small way.

I am so glad the crowd and the groups within the crowd were not scared off by John and could stay around to ask the question "what then shall we do?"

Because we too, get the answer to "what shall we do?" Not out of guilt or fear...the axe at the root of our tree...but to act out of love and generosity. To act from a place of knowing...remembering who we are and what it is we have to offer. Giving to those in need, living within limits, being honest in our work. These are the things that change us and change our world. With these things we help to prepare the way for Christ among us...Christ within us.

Don't be threatened by John  
Ask, what can I do?  
Don't act out of fear but out of love and generosity  
Then step in that direction  
Doing what you can  
With what you have  
Trusting it is enough  
To help prepare the way  
To simply move us along  
To do what's needed  
In humble small ways  
Let your imagination for Peace....be big. Amen.

### **Blessing**

Go into this week  
With the love of God  
The teachings of Jesus  
And the power of the Holy Spirit  
Go in Peace, Amen

Suggestion for action this week – send cards to front line workers with words of thanks and hope as they continue to work during this time of Covid.