

Glad, Thrilling Repentance

2nd Sun. in Advent – 12/05/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Luke 3:1-20 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 18 speaks of John the Baptizer and says, “**So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.**”

Introduction

- ✘ The Readings and hymns of this Advent season call us Christians to repentance of sin and the renewal of life as we prepare for the coming of our Savior King.
 - ➔ Case in point: we just sang in verse one of our Sermon Hymn, “Hark! A thrilling voice is sounding! ‘Christ is near,’ we hear it say. ‘Cast away the works of darkness, All you children of the day!’” (LSB 345:1).
 - ➔ So, since you just sang those words, my question is this, “Did you hear it? Did you actually hear the thrilling voice? And have you received that voice with the ‘good news’ that ‘Christ is near’ as a ‘Glad Sound’?”
- ✘ What voice are we talking about? What does it sound like? Well, the thrilling sound in our Gospel Reading this morning sounds something like this: “You brood of vipers! Produce fruits worthy of repentance! Share your clothing and your food, don’t cheat others out of money, and be content with what you get paid.”
 - ➔ Yeah, I can already hear what many of you are thinking, “Uh, Pastor, I thought this was supposed to be a glad sound, a thrilling voice.” But when you actually listen to John the Baptizer, he just sounds more like a fire and brimstone preacher than he does a “thrilling voice” of Good News.
 - ➔ “That’s not ‘good news’ if he’s telling his listeners that they’re bad and wrong; if he’s telling them that they need to do this or that.” Look, I think we’re all quick to admit that we are sinners, but even a sinful human heart doesn’t leap for joy at the idea of having our sins pointed out to us and being told what we should or should not be doing, right? That’s how our sinful hearts react, even if all of those things are true.
- ✘ However, as Christians, our hearts are not only sinful anymore are they? As we witnessed earlier in this service with Rex and affirmed with Janae, those who are baptized in the name of the Triune God, have now received God’s gift of faith; faith in Jesus Christ. And that faith-filled heart hears the truthful preaching of God’s Word differently, even when it convicts us of our sin.
 - ➔ Faith hears, even in a call to repentance, as we hear from John, that there is a better life to be lived than the one I previously lived outside of faith. When faith hears that there is a new King coming and a new Kingdom to live in; when faith hears that this King is merciful so that He does not condemn us for our sins and our weakness; when it hears that He is also the Lamb of God who bears our sins upon Himself on the cross; when faith hears that this King comes not only to forgive us but also to raise us up to a new and glorious life, then yes, even that call to repentance hits our hearts and minds of faith as a glad sound; as the most thrilling voice of all!
- ✘ As Christians, even in the middle of our struggles with sin and temptation; even when we instinctively want to stroke our ego and defensively repel against those voices that point out our faults or give us direction about how we should be living our lives; even then, we know we must confess that God’s ways are better than our ways; that God’s rebuke of our sin is actually what we need most to hear.

→ So rejoice with me today, dear Christians, at the glad news that Jesus Christ has come into the world to grant sinners like us His mercy and forgiveness, and to give us a new and better life! This is how I believe God wants us to reflect upon the voice of His prophet John the Baptizer as we hear him and his voice, “crying out in the wilderness” of our lives right now today.

I. The voice that calls us “Your brood of vipers” (v.7).

✘ Now, what if this was my opening line whenever someone came to me and asked to be baptized, or to baptize their child, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (v. 7)

→ Yet, that was apparently John’s first words when “the crowds...came out to be baptized by him” (v.7). There are a lot of polite and acceptable greetings out there, things like, “Welcome!” “How are you today?” “It’s nice to see you.” But calling people the offspring of poisonous serpents – not so courteous!

✘ Matthew tells us that John was especially making this accusation against the Pharisees and Sadducees. But here in Luke today, God’s Word shows that John did also rebuke the entire crowd of people with this stinging accusation.

→ In fact, as those hearing John’s message this morning, I believe you and I must hear the Baptist’s accusation directed at each of us as well: “You brood of vipers! You children of snakes and of that ancient snake, the devil!”

→ Before you get the hackles on your neck all up in tizzy, remember, John was the messenger that Malachi prophesied about; the messenger sent by God to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus Christ. And it was God who directed John to prepare and lead the hearts of people to repent of their sins, and through repentance to find forgiveness for their sins in Jesus.

→ So when John calls those before him and you and me today a “brood of vipers”, he’s calling us to put aside our defensive instincts and just take an honest view of our thoughts and attitudes and actions in this life. This isn’t just a colorful way of speaking, nor is it an exaggeration just for effect. I mean Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:1-2, “you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air”, which is the devil. And Jesus Himself speaks to every person’s parentage at birth since Adam and Eve fell to sin in the Garden of Eden. In John 8:44 He says, “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires.”

✘ So it is that, even as a believer in Christ, the sin which still pulses in my heart and veins is serious and vile; poisonous and deadly. And because of that sin, I deserve no more kindness and clemency from God than would be shown a venomous viper slithering on the ground. The repentance then to which John calls us all is a repentance that looks on my own sin as horrifying and repulsive; a repentance that confesses as we do at the beginning of worship, “I am a poor miserable sinner”; I “have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and...cannot free [myself] from [my] sinful condition”.

→ What’s different about a Christian’s heart is that it does not deny the reality of my own sin, or try to explain it away, but instead it takes that sin very seriously. A repentant heart looks upon one’s own sin with dread, and willingly agrees that I am indeed a “brood”, that is an offspring of the deadly snake, Satan himself!

✘ In reality John’s strong greeting worked to reveal those who were sincere and serious about their faith, as well as those who were hypocritically only going through the motions, because many people, including many Pharisees and teachers of the law, turned away and refused to believe John’s message. But many others owned up to the label “brood of vipers” and came to John in

repentance to hear the thrilling good news of the forgiveness of sins in the coming Son of God and Savior of the world.

II. The voice says, “Bear fruits...” (v.8).

- ✘ Another important part of John’s message was this in verse eight, “Bear fruits in keeping with repentance”. Since John is identifying how serious sin is and the only way to escape the severe judgment that we all deserve is through God’s work of true repentance and forgiveness in Jesus, then it makes sense that he would highlight that we Christians dare never think it is ok to just “go through the motions”.
 - ➔ He calls out everyone, whether it is the hypocrites of his day or the insincere believers of our time, and says, “Don’t think that just because you can trace your lineage to Abraham (v.8) or because you are a member of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod or any other earthly loophole that you might think will ‘prove’ your faith, that you are secure because of it.” God’s judgment is coming; the axe is already laid at the foot of the tree (v.9). Only through true repentance and Christ’s forgiveness will sinners escape “from the wrath to come” (v 7).
- ✘ Our own Lutheran Confessions are very clear on this point. They declare that good fruit, good works of every kind in life, should follow repentance in thanksgiving for Christ’s saving work. True faith is not consistent with just saying a few repentant words that you don’t really mean or believe. Neither does true faith explain away or ignore or hate God’s commandments. According to Scripture there is no inner repentance unless it also produces the outward turning away from sinning. This is what John the Baptizer means when he says, “Bear fruits worthy of repentance” (see Ap XII 131–32).
- ✘ Remember, John’s message is described in verse 18 as “good news” not bad news. And the good news is that whoever does repent of his sins finds forgiveness as a free gift from God; a free gift which does not depend upon our own good works or good fruits, but rather depends on the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

III. The voice that replies, “What shall we do?” (v.10)

- ✘ So in response to John’s message of good news we hear in verse 10 that “the crowds asked him, ‘What then shall we do?’” That’s the cry of an eager and excited heart, not a defensive or insincere one, right?
 - ➔ They did not view John’s words as a threat, but rather as a thrilling encouragement and promise: “Now in God’s gift of forgiveness you will bear fruits worthy of repentance!” Those who repented and were baptized by John for the forgiveness of their sins had hearts that were relieved and exuberant; hearts that begged John to tell them: now what? What shall we do now that God has graciously brought us into His kingdom?
- ✘ So John answered them in verses 11-14, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise”. The text says that even tax collectors and soldiers were asking John, “What shall we do?” It’s as if Luke includes these two groups of people because he is amazed at it! Even tax collectors and soldiers, two occupations particularly known for dishonesty and harassment, even they were transformed by the thrilling news of the Messiah. They gladly asked God’s prophet, John, what kinds of things they could do that would be worthy of such great and free forgiveness from the Lord.
 - ➔ And John answers that the “good fruits” of repentance and faith are actual changes in our daily lives. Whatever your vocation might be, show others the same kind of generous and merciful love that God has shown you.

✘ Paul often wrote this way when he encouraged the saints in various cities. To the Colossians, he prays that they may “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work” (Col. 1:10). To the Philippians he says, “Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil. 1:27). To the Ephesians: “I therefore...urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (Eph. 4:1). And to the Thessalonians: “Walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:12).

➔ This is our manner of life today as well, isn't it dear Christians? By God's grace through faith alone, we too desire to live lives worthy of our great Savior; worthy of the great salvation which has been proclaimed and given to us. Not that our lives, in themselves, are worthy of the Lord. We will never bear enough good fruit so that we can say, “There, now that's the kind of life worthy of the Lord”. No, all people; all Christians fall short. That is why we live always in repentance; why our confidence and trust must always be in Christ alone for forgiveness and salvation.

Conclusion

✘ So this Advent, when we hear God's call to reflect upon our sin and receive our coming Lord with repentant hearts; when God's Word directs us to “bear fruits in keeping with that repentance”; and when we consider the Spirit's prompting in our vocation as Christians whose response to His grace is *Sharing God's Word* and *Serving All*, may our hearts be glad and our voices ring out at the thrilling voice from God this season; at the Good News of our coming Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.