

## Sermon Advent 2

### Year A

[RCL] Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 26:36-44; Psalm 122

#### Bear Fruit Worthy of the Gift of Repentance

One has to love John the Baptist! Not for his sense of fashion – although camel’s hair clothing is quite trendy. And definitely not his diet. But our fondness for John the Baptist can be rooted in the fact that he is a ‘tell it as it is preacher.’ He doesn’t fit in the box of safe, well-dressed, predictable, comfortable religion. He understands his purpose fully and is living into his calling.

As we read about John the Baptist’s preaching, it’s very clear that he wasn’t concerned about being Mr. Popular. When we read about John the Baptist, we see he was a straight talker, no filler words or smooth talking with John; and he wasn’t afraid to offend people in order to tell them the truth.

We meet John the Baptist at the beginning of each of the gospels – today in Matthew. He is an advance man for Jesus. He comes into the territory and gets people ready to hear what Jesus is going to preach. He comes bearing news. He comes offering something amazing. But only if one’s heart is in the right place. John wants to see everyone around him benefit from what he has to offer.

We hear John tell his listeners in verse 8, “bear fruit worthy of repentance.” That is, if you repent of your sins, if you confess your sin, say you will turn to God, then there must be something to show for it. It MUST affect the way you live.

It might be helpful in this great season of our Church, to ask ourselves the hard question of what fruits are we bearing? What fruits are we bearing in this Advent season?

“Bearing fruit worthy of repentance” as Chris Surber puts it, is living in such a way, as to outwardly express the reality of what repentance has produced in our lives. In other words, it means that our lives reflect a lifestyle, action, and choice pattern which are consistent with having repented of sin – that is – with having made a declaration against the destructive things of this world in favor of aligning ourselves with the beautiful things of the Kingdom of God.

We are all being called to bear fruits that are worthy of the gift of repentance. The New Living Translation of the Bible breaks it down a little more for us, it says “Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones.” (Luke 3:8)

John the Baptist is telling us to live in such a manner befitting of having repented.

Repentance is an integral part of the Christian life.

Repentance is not a onetime act of confession or a onetime recital of a certain prayer or creedal statement.

Repentance is the declaration of the heart, of the soul, of everything that is in us, in response to the terrible burden of our own sin and the great weight of God's love for us, in turning from that which is destroying us to that which saves us!

Repentance is more than a deep abiding inward decision to reject this life for the life of Christ! It is the ongoing and living decision to choose Christ and live for Him daily; even more so to allow Him to live in us!

Repentance is the attitude of the heart, which is thankful for the grace of God...

The papaya tree is a fascinating tree because sometimes there will be a papaya tree that didn't bear fruit at all. It will go as far as flowering, but those flowers never produce fruit. It isn't until the head is cut off, will it start growing again and produce fruit. There is probably a good scientific explanation for that – however for the purposes of this message, sometimes there are things, situations, people even, that we have to cut away from our lives in order for us to bear fruit.

When it comes to fruit trees, it's important to know that the quality and quantity each season is largely based on the watering, pruning, fertilizer and care the tree receives.

These analogies beg the questions, How are we the Church preparing ourselves to bear fruit? What is does the quality and quantity of our fruit look like? What are some of the things we have to cut away? And are people rushing into our doors because of our fruit?...

The season of Advent marks a time of preparation and hope for the coming of Christ. Perhaps in this Advent season we individually, as faith communities and as a Church use this time as a time to water, prune and fertilize so that we bear quality fruit in abundance.

Our brother John teaches us in this gospel several things - three things worthy of mentioning today. The first is The Power of Preparation. In the seasons when we don't water, prune or fertilize our fruit trees our crop isn't as big or successful. Alexander Graham Bell got it right when he said "Before anything else, preparation is the key to success."

So how do we prepare? Well our brother John has laid the foundation for us. One of the first steps will be to repent. And because God isn't through with any of us, we might have to do it several times a day.

Preparation takes various forms. Some include praying, staying grounded in the Word of God because you can't live by it if you don't know it. One cannot practice what's not imbedded in them.

The second thing we can learn from this Baptist – is to Seek God. None of us are entitled to God’s grace, favor and mercy. John reminds us ever so profoundly that not because we can point to God’s inheritance as ours does that mean that we don’t have to recognize that God could chose whomever God wants.

We heard in last week’s gospel lesson “That two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. And we are charged to keep awake for we do not know on what day your Lord is coming.” If we are seeking God daily, we don’t have to worry whether we are going to be the one taken up or not.

Preparation and continuously seeking God helps with the third thing John teaches us today and that is humility. John was the forerunner for the modern day evangelist as he unapologetically shared the good news of Jesus Christ. He was a man filled with faith and a role model to those of us who wish to share our faith with others.

It was the late Nelson Mandela who described humility as a quality within easy reach of every soul – and among others is the foundation of one’s spiritual life.

Mandela’s life just like John’s are examples to us of the seriousness with which we are to approach the Christian life and our call to ministry, whatever that may be.

John remained humble in his ministry recognizing that he was not Jesus; and that his purpose was significant and different from that of Jesus. John exemplifies humility in the lay leadership he provided as Jesus’ forerunner.

When we prepare ourselves and consistently seek God daily we live lives that reflect a humble attitude of gratefulness to God for God’s love and mercy. And we become more able to bear fruit for the Kingdom of God!

When we in reverence bow our heads, or kneel at the confession we are each offered an opportunity to repent. We are offered the chance to turn back from those thoughts and habits and actions that take us out of step with God. We are invited to move back again in harmony with God’s vision for us and for our world as we remember the savior who died for our sins and rose again and will come again.

During this season of waiting and great preparation, as we seek to find again the one who first called us, to follow him; who still sends messengers like John to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation. May that God, give us grace to heed their warnings and strength to forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ.

Amen!

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