

SERMON NOTES: Sunday 15th December 2024
Text: Luke 3:7-18
Advent 3C

So here we are with this fantastic scene
in the 3rd chapter of the Gospel of Luke.
We see this wild-eyed prophet John the Baptist.
Crowds gather around him
wondering if he was the One
who was sent by God to save them
and the whole world.

Luke tells us that John the Baptist
greeted these crowds
who were coming to be baptised with these words:

Luke 3: 7, 9

*“You brood of vipers!
Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?...
Even now the axe 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.”*

Later he speaks of Jesus,

Luke 3:17

*“...who is coming soon....and 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.*

Vipers. Wrath. Axe. Cut down. Winnowing fork. Unquenchable fire.

Then comes my favourite part: Perhaps a bit of dark humour on Luke’s part.....

Luke 3:18

So with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the Good News to the people.

Well I’m glad Luke cleared that up,
because with all the axes, forks, and raging fires,
I almost get overwhelmed by the “Good News”
going on here.

No one could accuse John the Baptist of being Mr. Sunshine.

He meant business.

So, where was this Good News he spoke about?

Every tree that does not bear fruit
is cut down (by the axe) and thrown into the fire.
The wheat is separated by the chaff

(with the winnowing fork)
and the chaff is thrown into the fire.

Strange as it may seem,
Separation is actually a pretty
major theme of the Bible.
The Creation story in Genesis
chapter 1 is full of separations:
light from darkness,
waters above from waters below,
dry land from water,
day from night.

In Exodus,
there's the separation of the children of Israel
from the Promised Land,
and the separation of the Red Sea
to get them back to where they belong.

In "Leviticus,"
clear lines are drawn
to separate ordinary things
from unclean things,
and holy things from everything else.

Our God is a God who separates.
Injustice is separated from justice.
Righteousness from unrighteousness.
Holiness from evil.
Light from the Darkness.

So the crowds,
after being called a brood of vipers
and threatened with axes and fire, ask:
What then should we do?

In other words,
how can we avoid being cut down and burned?
If there's going to be a separation,
how can we end up being on the better side?

Lucky for the crowds, John has an answer:

Luke 3: 11, 13, 14

"Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise...Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you...Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

So, to bear fruit worthy of repentance
and maintain a proper spiritual distance from the fire—
.....be satisfied with what you have,
.....and give from what you have
with those who don't have enough.

In other words - *Share*.

Trees that bear fruit share.

Trees that fail to bear fruit don't.

Wheat shares.

Chaff doesn't.

The Good News is that a King is coming—
and He's coming to bring in a Kingdom.
And in this Kingdom people demonstrate the glory,
and the power,
and the majesty of God...
by sharing what they have.

And those who don't share with others
are separated out and thrown into the unquenchable fire.

Now, before you think that this is perhaps
an overly simplistic teaching...

we have to read on
in the writing of Luke to see how
this is lived out.

Luke also wrote the Book of Acts,
which is the story of how
the followers of Jesus carried on his ministry
after his death and Resurrection.

Towards the end of the second chapter of "Acts,"
we find a summary of how the first followers of Jesus lived:

Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

So everyone was in awe.
Wonders and signs were being done.
They were selling all they had
and giving to the hungry, the thirsty, and the poor.
They held things in common.

In other words, they shared with each other,
and anyone who was in need.

Jesus was risen from the dead.
Death couldn't hold him down.
The Resurrection power of God
was working wonders in the world.
And to testify to the amazing things that God was doing...
they shared.

They didn't crash mountains into the sea.
They didn't levitate off the ground.
They didn't have halos floating over their heads.
They shared.

We see John the Baptist in the Luke's Gospel,
which we hear in Advent,
already pointing towards Easter.

Already showing,
not just what we need to do,
but who we need to be.

In sharing,
these early Christians were not just sharing
their goods and food,
but were in effect sharing the very Kingdom,
Jesus has ushered in and made real by his death and resurrection.

They shared.
Jesus is risen.