

Advent 3 (C)
Year C 2021 Luke 3: 7-18
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“What then should we do?”
Gaudete Sunday - Third Sunday in Advent

It is my spiritual practice, as taught to me, to make a retreat both in Advent in Lent. I find that it re-grounds my prayer practice and orients my life accordingly. I thought the clergy retreat might be that, however, it was a necessary educational formational program which dealt with abuses which affect the church. It was the most riveting and emotional program I had ever sat through. Effective, it was! Heartbreaking it was! The awareness and watchfulness elicited are tools for healthy congregational functioning.

This retreat in Rochester NY however was silent one. . We had two days of Centering Prayer which consists of silent prayer. There were 12 30 - minute sessions in all.

I have practiced this prayer for many years and this is the place where God gets at me. It is a barren vulnerable space- a space where in years past I have raged, begged, been broken open and healed. For all of us this is never a done deal, however this desert place I find, is where God communicates to the deepest places of the heart.

It is not easy and leaves itself open to constant distraction. With practice and support, love and direction from God is communicated. People all over the world pray this way. One joins in the divine dance continually available and occurring.

This retreat reboots the program of this practice. Don't get me wrong. The liturgy has profound significance- not to be cast aside. Silence in prayer leads many to understand the sacramental nature of our baptism in community and the deeper place of worship centered in the Paschal Mystery. Prayer in this time of year leads us to the wonderment and mystery of Mary's consent.

Thus it is appropriate to rejoice as we see the goal of the season approaching: “The Lord is near.” You will notice that our Liturgical color for the day is rose pink which celebrates the joy of our expectation.

Liturgically through readings and music, we hold two poles of Jesus’ life together at one time, his incarnational birth alongside his death and resurrection. John’s preaching and baptism binds together both the beginning and ending of Jesus’ earthly ministry.

Advent’s focus is more on the Lord’s final coming at the end of time, the orientation brings into sharper focus a need for vigilance, a sharper focus, an ongoing repentance. This summons for renewal is what John is so keenly attuned to.

By the time of Christ, baptism had evolved drawing upon the symbolism of cleansing. Many religions in fact had developed rites to include water which was used in enacting this ritual. This was part of the rite of initiation into the Covenant people - the Jews. For Gentile converts, this involved a ritual bath — by which the filth of paganism was symbolically washed away.

But above all, John’s baptism was preparatory and temporary. It was full of expectation, anticipating its own fulfillment in another’s” baptism: “I baptize you with water for repentance but the one who is more powerful than I is coming after me. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Matt 3:11).¹

John’s baptism was for those understanding their need for need for inner cleansing and renewal. So then, isn’t it remarkable that Jesus begins his public ministry by submitting to John’s baptism of repentance? Jesus to whom no personal sin is attributed? What does this mean? What is he doing in such a compromising position?

When at his baptism Jesus embraces humanity in its sinful condition, God embraces him. God’s voice from heaven identifies Jesus as his beloved servant. The descent of the Spirit informs us that with the coming of Jesus, a new creation is springing into life.

¹ Julia Gatta *Life In Christ - Practicing Christian Spirituality* Church Publishing Inc. pg. 2

He is emphatically coming alongside human beings in their sinfulness. He is joining in and thus defines the radical comprehensive scope of his ministry from the outset. It will thrust upon him criticism throughout his life as he dines publicly with sinners and continues on to his shameful death which addresses our human desperate plight: "Those who are well are in no need of a physician, but those who are sick: (Matt 9:12). This is endless and unconditional love brought to the world.

-That nothing less than complete metanoia with an ethical U-turn was required. Purification is necessary. Here, John as an untamed prophet exhorts more than simple commands. He purports a way of being, an integrity of action, memory and identity which is reassuring of tradition based on values claimed. He questions those who have come out into the desert to be baptized. He is suspicious of their motives, calling them a brood of vipers.²

John is responding to specific groups in that time. He is addressing individual's from different groups, as crowds ask him what to do tax collections soldiers, to those who have more .(Specific here) .practice of

exhortation, stop it, you tax too much stop it, you have more than you need...than share. Practice hospitality... clear evidence of fruit!

So then...what are WE to do?

I recognized as I sat in my chair that God will have her way with me. Perhaps the answer is that we take stock of our lives and let the sacred heart of Jesus be one with us. This requires leaning in toward one another, being vulnerable, accessible and understanding. Examine your lives before Christ (Exhortation BCP>>>). Consider God's in-breaking into our world with repentance and fruits - a change of perspective of how you see things, then there should be fruits worthy of repentance. The way you move about in the world, what you do, does this reflect a changed perspective that God is here and present. There should be a correlation in how to see how God sees and whom God sees.

God, help us to see in our blindness.

² Feasting on the Word

After the personal rite of reconciliation the prayer book ends accordingly:
Now there is rejoicing in heaven, for you were lost, now you are found; you were dead, now you are alive in Christ Jesus our Lord. Go abide in peace. The Lord has put away all your sins.

We are so busy doing that we don't know how to be. The closing remarks from Liturgy last evening were:

"Don't just do something, sit there."

We are called continually to turn to Christ and feed on him in your heart. Be reconciled and made new.

Glory to the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen