

ADVENT 3C

ST JAMES AND GOOD SHEPHERD, LACONIA, NH

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The Third Sunday of Advent. We have another appearance by John the Baptist. “You brood of vipers” – that should get your attention! John is a fiery character, but well-grounded and centered on his mission, which was not to be the Messiah, but to prepare the way for Jesus.

Sometimes in reading about John we get put off by his rhetoric – I mean no one wants to be called a brood of vipers. But then John is asked for clarification, and he gives what I think is one of the most thoughtful synopses of how we should act. He tells them to share. If you have 2 coats, give one away, the same with food. Take no more than what is due you and be satisfied with your wages. Pretty simple instructions, clear and to the point. I would expect nothing less from John. Putting those words into action in our lives, now that is another matter.

John also exhorts the people not to rely on the work of others, because we will all be judged according to our own deeds. Repentance is at the core of John’s teaching. John calls us to repentance. Not just by word, but repentance of heart. Repentance is never a one-and-done deal. Repentance is a way of life, a commitment to walk in Jesus’ footsteps. Repentance is to continually evaluating our behavior and asking the questions: Am I kind? Loving? Do I share? Do I live a

life of satisfaction and gratitude? Maybe the questions articulated by John should be the roadmap for our lives. Are we willing to share, are we satisfied with what we have, have we opened our hearts to prepare the way for Jesus? Only when we have done these things, can we live our best lives, our richest lives. Only when we have done these things, can we rejoice in the life we have been given.

Our reading from Philippians this morning reminds us of the importance of rejoicing. Our lives should not be stuck in what we haven't done or should have done, but in the joy of God's grace, God's love for us. Sometimes that is hard too. Especially this time of year, when people are often sad. It's always hardest to be sad when the culture tells you to be happy – "It's almost Christmas!". But maybe in that sadness we are best able to ask for God's healing touch, we are best able to repent and accept forgiveness. None of us are perfect and we all have things that we can do better. As John reminds us, we are often a brood of vipers, but even with that, John still proclaimed the Good News to the people. John proclaimed the Good News to the people - can you hear it?

Sometimes it is hard to hear the Good News among all the chatter of our lives. Sometimes, particularly this year, it is hard to see the way forward. So much of our world is broken, so much of our systems don't function, but we must hold

on to the Good News. We must not succumb to fear or despair. We are a people of hope, and no matter how bad the news may be, we must hold fast to Hope. Hope will lead us, despair will not. Hope will show us the future, fear will not. John calls us to wake up, to see our lives, to see ourselves for what we truly are. To see what can be fixed, to fix it, and to rejoice in what we do well. Rejoice! That is the message of the Good News. Rejoice that God walks with us, even when we are not so sure. Rejoice, for we are a people of hope, we are a people of love. And rejoice, for we are a brood of Vipers, but God shows us how to be better. God offers a new way of repentance and love. Rejoice!

Philippians' bears repeating:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen