

Readings:

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Isaiah 12:2-6

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:7-18

## **Sermon December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

### *God is Just*

In our gospel this morning John is setting the stage for Jesus' ministry. John has witnessed much injustice happening in his community, and so, is calling people to change their ways.

Luke the gospel writer, highlights two groups of people that John is targeting with his message. The tax collector and the soldier. People who filled these roles for the Empire were perceived as being sympathizers of the oppressive regime. More often than not tax collectors and soldiers that policed areas represented those of Jewish origin who the Governor hired. The Empire was vast and often chose to hire people within the country they occupied for jobs like these.

Since they were of Jewish origin taking on roles to support the Empire they were often looked on with disdain by their fellow Jewish brethren. It didn't help that in many cases the tax collectors abused their role overtaxing people for their own fiscal benefit. Soldiers too often pillaged and abused those living in poverty.

So, in response to the tax collector and soldier's question: What should we do? John challenges the tax collector and the soldier to be content with their pay and treat everyone fairly. Or in other words, stop oppressing the poor.

In a few moments, Jesus will enter the scene and for the remainder of the gospel of Luke Jesus's preaching, teaching, and actions will reiterate this message over and over again to all those he encounters who are in positions of authority.

During Advent and Christmas our eyes, ears, and hearts are more sensitive to the injustices we see happening in our world. Though we are invited to buy, buy, buy, and receive, receive, receive we also are challenged to think

about those who are victimized by oppression. We are challenged to stop marginalizing the poor and help.

We find ourselves generously supporting organizations like the Mustard Seed or CLWR's gifts of the heart ministry. At All Saints we create hampers to help people in need in our congregation and community during this time.

Though we enjoy Christmas classics like Frank Sinatra's "Have yourself a Merry Little Christmas" or Nat King Cole's "Christmas Song" we also enjoy our classic Christmas hymns like "Away in a Manger" or "Silent Night" or "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!" that point us to the manger where Jesus is born. In a village surrounded by people living in poverty. Near poor shepherds sitting in a field who will be the first to hear the good news of Jesus.

John Lennon's famous line "so this is Christmas, what have you done..." reminds us that we live in a world where a lot of people are treated unfairly. Whether through circumstance or by the actions of those in positions of authority. And we are called to act. To love and help those in need. To challenge authorities who abuse their power oppressing the poor.

John is paving the way for Jesus. Opening our hearts to see that the Christmas message. The gospel message is a message that invites us to love and help those in need. A message that invites us to challenge the oppressive regimes that exist in our society. A message that invites us to breathe fairness into the lives of people living in our community. This is core to the Christmas story.

John is paving the way for Jesus. And when people start questioning who John is. John goes on to say that even though he is calling each individual to come and receive the baptism of repentance hoping that the tax collector, the soldier, and everyone of us here will turn our focus from ourselves to others. Jesus will come to call the whole Empire to change. Jesus will baptize us with the Holy Spirit empowering us as God's people to not only change ourselves but the world into a place that reflects God's kingdom.

A world where people are loved and respected no matter their status. A world where oppression is no more. A world where our focus is on God and our neighbor. Not just ourselves.

In our baptism, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are blessed with the promise that God will walk with us helping us be the people God calls us to be. We are marked with the cross of Christ forever. Reminding us of the sacrifice Christ makes on our behalf. And also, inviting us to show that generosity to others.

John challenges us to live this way everyday of the year. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit to help us live this way everyday of the year. Because, God loves us in this way everyday of the year. Not just at the manger. But, also in the wilderness. On the beach. In the village. In the city. On the cross. Beside the empty tomb. God loves us everyday everywhere.

Let us pray, gracious God, we give thanks that you love us despite our failures. Open our hearts to those in need. When we struggle to be generous call us back to our baptismal promise. Giving us hope that with you Spirit we can live the generous life you call us to live. Breathing fairness and justice into our communities. **Amen.**