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BC Synod Supply Pastor
Dec. 15, 2024
Third Sunday of Advent
Lectionary Year C
St. Luke 3: 7 to 18*

The words spoken by St. John the Baptist appeal to me on a deeply instinctual, emotional level during this time of year. He uses the kind of language that I wish I had the freedom to speak publicly during the season of Advent — without consequences, of course. I find myself driven to frustration trying to navigate around town and accomplish simple tasks, while the roads are flooded by a horde of shoppers and consumers interested in making themselves and their families happy.

This is no easy task. There wasn't a day that went by this past week where someone did not cut in front of me in line, push past me in the grocery store without so much as a word, or slide into the parking spot that I had patiently and politely waited to occupy.

But the truly sad part that tweaks my overblown sense of self-righteousness is the phenomena in which we see *masses of people* —absolute crowds—flock to Santa Claus parades, picture ops, shopping centres, and “fun-filled, memory-making” activities while the suffering of the world needs some real attention.

I fantasized about hanging from the giant chandelier in the mall, screaming at the crowds, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?! You milk-and-cookie, parking-space-stealing, lovers of fat mythical white-men in red clothing!!!” It seemed like one of *the best* ideas I've ever had, and I thought seriously about how to physically get onto the chandelier...

There are a few complications, though —other than facing arrest by the RCMP. One, I am a fat white-man. And second, thanks to the Celtic genes of my mother, my hair (what little is left) is going whitish too.

Come to think of it, I've been wearing a lot of red lately. So, last night, out of fear of possible hypocrisy, I decided to skip the whole thing.

And this is also why the words of St. John the Baptist are spoken for us, for you, for me: consumers, those unaware of others sufferings, the indifferent, self-righteous baptized sinners, etc., *all of us* become a brood of vipers in this season...we clog the arteries of the cities and towns we live in in a commercial rush that has become the capitalist, eat-or-be-eaten way of celebrating festivals — feast days—in December. And if we are not doing that, those of us who swore *not to get caught up in the holiday anxiety again this year* cannot escape being sucked into the whirlpool of an environment full of sinners who “know not what they do,” because “if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves...” Hypocrisy finds us all, because righteousness belongs to God alone.

...And here we are, gathered together against the darkness, trying to deal with the world as we wait for the coming of Christ, God's righteousness. We listen to St. John bark at the crowds...and St. Luke dares to call this “good news.” Surprisingly, it is. St. John does not exhort and admonish for his own sake. He preaches about, and in the name of the one who sent him. Certainly, sinners cringe at the Baptist's cry...but *stay awake! Do not miss* who he is speaking about and what the One Who is Coming will do.

The good news is that Jesus Christ comes to do what God has chosen for creation...the good news is what Christ does to us that creates his Church. Christ clears away the chaff, clears away all that is not life-giving, clears away everything that is dead with the world and dead inside of us. Christ makes all flesh the threshing floor of the cross. We know what Jesus takes up...they are expressed in

our prayers, on the news, in our thoughts, in our daily lives, and in the quiet truths whispered when we are alone:

Children are dying in custody when they are torn from their parents...

My father has just told me he has AIDS...

Canada has a racism problem...

The world is running out of fresh water...

My sister is an alcoholic and a drug addict...

I hate my neighbor....

I do not want to go on living...

Christ takes up *all of creation* on his threshing floor. Anything other than the fullness of life —everything that threatens to distract us, our violence, our corporate sin, our despair, our failure—Christ clears away like chaff from grain. Everything about us and in us that is incomplete Christ removes so that abundant life and all that God intends for us flourishes. Our flesh will bear the marks of Christ's salvation. The Advent of the Church is lifelong.

In the iconography of the ancient and Eastern Church, there is a recurring image called "The Deisis." It is an image of Christ enthroned, holding a book of the Gospels. On Christ's left hand, there is John the Baptist pointing to Jesus. On the right side of Jesus Christ is the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, also pointing to him. The reading of the holy gospel according to St. Luke in our assemblies of the Church mirrors this image. In today's gathering, we hear St. John —the fulfillment of all the prophets in the Old Testament—preach the pure gospel: he announces the Word, Jesus Christ, by speaking about all of the things that Christ comes to do. And John does this using Isaiah's words...he preaches Christ, who Christ is, according to the Scriptures. This is what we hear, gathered in the Church, in the midst of the Advent of our lives as we all await Christ, the One spoken of in

the Scriptures, the One who comes to us...the One who justifies sinners...who clears the threshing floor of the Church, winnowing away all of our dead chaff with the fire of the Holy Spirit in the waters of baptism.

Christ is who we will see, living and taking on flesh when we gather next. We will see Mary, the first Christian, the one who hears the Word and believes...Mary who is transformed as the Word comes to live within her.

Christ has sanctified her, and made her holy...And she is who we become in this gathering: the Church, the mother who gives birth to the children of God. And, as is promised, "*all flesh will see it, together.*" John's preached Word; Mary's living gospel. Together, they frame the space in which Christ comes to us.

Jesus is the one whom God has chosen to show us mercy. The Word of God is preached to everything that we are: every mixture of grain and chaff, every bit of sinner and beloved. Listen with ears of faith; Christ will transform us. Repent and believe...take and eat...keep awake and see...go from hear and tell everyone who will listen: the Word takes flesh to dwell among us, and the world will be changed; we will receive life and live. Thanks be to God. Amen.