

WELCOME 6th January 2019 – Epiphany '19 C

Ecclesiastes 3:1-14 & Luke 3:1-6

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! Happy New Year!

It is great to have you here. Please stay with us for morning tea after worship so we can get a chance to know one another better...

After the fireworks the air clears. After the resolutions are made, most are quickly forgotten. After the new clean calendar, the same busyness returns.

Each turning of the clock holds great promise...enormous hope...It can also leave regrets about what is past, lost, left behind or stuck in dull sameness.

But in Christ, each season of life can be filled with hope not despair, promise not futility, and thankfulness not regret. The Gospel recreates our lives, and reorients our living to the way of Jesus and the rule of the Father's love.

This new year – a Time of 'No Regrets' opens us to a lifetime of fulfilment and contentment in every season. The coming of Jesus Re-Sets our relationship with the Father & calls us into his world with the message of his gift of salvation & life without end in his presence.

We'll explore & experience that together today...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Light of Christ, awaken us this hour to the glory of your presence in our midst. Shine among us in such a way that the darkness without & shadows within are driven away. Help us to recognize our sin for the snare of death that it is. Enable us to behold the world as you created it to be, as you created us to be. Empower us to move from darkness to light, from sin to new life. May your be bright enough to illuminate your way for those around us...We pray in the name of the Word made flesh, the light which is the light of all people. Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

EPIPHANY '19 C – A TIME OF NO REGRETS: RE-SET

- FAITH CHAT:** 1. What do you think is the best invention during your lifetime? Why?
2. Please share how you got through a particularly rough time in your life.

There is something I still find exciting about a New Year. I get jazzed not so much with the celebrating at midnight...although when I'm among friends I don't fall asleep waiting for the clock to strike (my family sees me fall asleep all the time so that's no big deal) but even at my age I am still hope-full (or naive) enough to believe that there will be something new/vibrant/exciting/good in a new year.

I know most of us can think of a time when we really hoped a new year or a new something would give us or someone we know a fresh start. We hoped a new job would open some new doors...create new opportunities/new \$\$\$\$. We hoped a child moving into a new grade new school would bring some new excitement to their learning or some new friends into their world. We look with excitement at pregnant friends/family & think "Man this is going to be so awesome!" I know you hear me say for a lot of folks I hope they leave 2018 & its troubles in 2018...Maybe that's you? Just hanging out for a fresh start. Really longing for something to be different.

Maybe it's less specific or personal but your heart breaks at the pain of the world. You've been touched by the desperation the places our sponsored Compassion children live. You've wept over seemingly endless cycles of violence & injustice. You live to wake up to a news report that says we've been 789 days without a terrorist incident or a shot fired in anger. Maybe it is personal...& serious...persistent

That's one of the reasons I really love reading Luke's gospel...When he writes his biography of Jesus it is grounded in time/our world. Luke more than any other gospel writer anchors his telling of the life of Jesus in time/the history of this world. Scholars tell me there's approx 84 specific historical markers Luke uses (Luke/Acts) to assure his readers he writes truth...not mythology, not fable, not fairy tale, not epic hero story. Truth: grounded in the real lives of real people in this real world.

Like this: *It was now the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, the Roman emperor. Pontius Pilate was governor over Judea; Herod Antipas was ruler over Galilee; his brother Philip was ruler over Iturea & Traconitis; Lysanias was ruler over Abilene. Annas & Caiaphas were the high priests.* Then he follows that with: *At this time a message from God came to John son of Zechariah, who was living in the wilderness.*

Each of these 1st chapters of Luke's gospel have historical anchor points that let us know Luke's done what he promised...give the facts – the unvarnished truth Lk 1:4 – *“an accurate account so that you'll know for certain the truth you've been taught.”*

But that doesn't give you the full picture...really. Let's look at it like this...First the names...Tiberias, Pontius Pilate, Herod Antipas, his brother Philip, Lysanias, AND Annas & Caiaphas. In other words, the Emperor, the Governor, a couple of petty appointed local “puppet kings” & the religious establishment in Jerusalem. That's their official titles but who are they? Gov't by force & threat. Rule by political expedience. Advancement by relationship. They are the establishment...well-connected white-collar crew...elite...cabinet front-benchers...news anchors...editors & moguls...Packers & Rineharts & Murdochs

At this time a message from God came to John son of Zechariah, who was living in the wilderness. In contrast to the established power structures of the world: John...not in Rome/Jerusalem/centers of power. THE WILDERNESS. No official title. No white collar. No connections. No palace. Just John & the Word of God. And that word says...?

1st - The text literally reads, *“The word of God CAME UPON John.”* It hit him like a freight train...it wasn't a cool/calm/collected/comfortable word...it was a compulsion - a call. Luke quotes Is 40 & says this is who John is: *“voice in the wilderness...prepare the way of the Lord...clear the obstacles...”* & this is from a section of Isaiah that promises God is working to restore his people...bring the exiles home to Jerusalem from captivity. In part, *“Comfort, comfort my people...Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone & her sins are pardoned...God will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart.”* Beautiful tender word from God to sinful broken people

But for that to happen...for God's glory & salvation & tenderness to capture us...for God to restore & refresh & reclaim his people... something else has to happen...you need to back up to Is 35:4...*“Say to those w/ fearful hearts, “Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come w/ vengeance, w/ terrible recompense. He will come & save you.”* I'm guessing you didn't write that verse on your Christmas cards? Luke says John came preaching *“that people should be baptized to show they had repented of their sin & turned to God to be forgiven.”* Good bet he quoted that verse. John, in the manner of the prophets of old knows that humans have forever chosen to turn to their own ends & their own interests rather than live responsive to the word & will of God...Sin is that twisted self-centred guidance system in all of us that eventually kills us & destroys what

God made good in his image. John actually looks at the crowds who have heard his preaching & come to the river to be baptized & he says, “*You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee the coming wrath?*” For God to ‘comfort’ God must deal with their sin-twisted hearts. Now just look at that...The collected power & might & wisdom & structures of the world do not save. John does not promise a new initiative a new scheme a new policy a new dept a new cash splash new revival. Those. Change. Nothing.

John receives the very same word that the angels announced to the shepherds. The invasion of Christ into the world – the incarnation – the coming of God to rescue & redeem & recreate everything according to his will & purpose is good news of great joy for all people – not only for some people – not just for the poor – not just for the oppressed – not for only the elite & insiders.

The word God blasts into John & that Gabriel & the hosts of heaven deliver is that the arrival of Christ among us is good news of great joy for all the people because in Christ God is going to do heart transforming work in each of us. The arrival of Christ among us is good news of great joy for all people because in Christ God is going to do the death-destroying work of forgiving sin, annihilating the evil one & overcoming the grave.

What is promised by God through Isaiah, & what John up to his hips in the Jordan River declares is not simply a rearranging of the world’s order of things, with the poor & the rich changing stations in the old creation. What the prophets promise & John says is now, is God’s work of a New Creation is begun in a New Adam born to another Eve. What the prophets promise & John says is right before their eyes is not condemnation for some but consolation for others; it’s the transformation of all by the power of God that makes all things new.

John declares that the day has arrived when God re-sets our relationship with him by his love by his power by his initiative by his doing. And John promises that God never relents from his life redeeming work in us... The Gospel isn’t just an announcement of what God did. The Gospel is what God does...today...tomorrow & again & again. There really is the chance for “new” in this New Year...God says so.

It is good news of great joy for all people that the God who comes among us as we are, who loves you as you are — loves you too much to leave you as you are. He loves you too much to leave you forgiven & then to make your way from there. Thank you God that God loves me as I am, but, God, I don’t want to remain as I am — my family certainly doesn’t want God to leave me as I am. I want God to make me more like him...to bear the fruit of his Spirit (love joy peace patience kindness faithfulness goodness gentleness & self-control) all over the place...to really take every thought word deed & use it for his glory...long way from that some days. The God who declared you righteous & made you his by baptizing you into the death/resurrection of Jesus Christ is yet at work to make you into what by grace he has called you.

At this time the word of God came to John son of Zechariah, who was living in the wilderness. Then John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River, preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins & turned to God to be forgiven. Quickly...sin is NOT WHAT YOU DO that ticks God off hurts his feelings or rouses his wrath. Say that again...Sin is who you love most.... who calls the shots...gets to decide...Sin is who you love most...who has your heart

Repentance is NOT WHAT YOU DO to get God to love you more. There’s nothing you can do to make God love you more & there’s nothing you can do to make God love you less. The Father’s heart is no different when the prodigal comes home than on the day he walked off the farm pockets loaded with dad’s cash. God’s heart is always love towards you. He’s crazy about you. He can’t stop himself. God is love. From before the first dawn of the first morning of the first day of Creation the Father had chosen you to be died for by his Son. He had selected you as the temple where His Spirit would live. Nothing you can do alters God’s love for you. Opt out if you must, but that does not change the Father’s heart toward you.

Repentance is how God transforms the object of your love now that you know how unreservedly you are loved. Repentance is how God shapes your desires your loving your heart so you can look at yourself in the mirror without condemnation guilt & shame. Repentance is that honest self-appraisal that begins with “Father put to death in me everything but your presence. Bring to life in me only the image of your Son and the power of your Spirit.” Repentance is that honest self-appraisal that honestly exposes to the Father the patterns & habits of seeing, thinking, speaking, acting, relating, & loving as if we were God...because all those habits & patterns corrupt our understanding of God, our neighbor, & ourselves. But the coming of Jesus re-Sets our relationship with the Father & calls us into his world with the message of his gift of salvation & life without end in his presence.

That's where we begin this new year...Each turning of the clock holds great promise...enormous hope...It can also leave regrets about what is past, lost, left behind or stuck in dull sameness. But in Christ, each season of life can be filled with hope not despair, promise not futility, and thankfulness not regret. Jesus alone recreates our lives, and reorients our living to the way of Jesus and the rule of the Father's love.

Let's pray with that in mind: **Father put to death in me everything but your presence. Bring to life in me only the image of your Son and the power of your Spirit. Make me light as he is light. Make me holy as you are holy. Let the abundant life you give be abundant in me for the sake of your Kingdom and in witness to the world. In Jesus' Name...Amen.**