

WELCOME 11th December 2022 – 3rd Sunday in Advent '22 A

Luke 3:7-18

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible** Study Qs are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom** Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m. Which will resume THIS Friday!

As we move into this week... **Pay** it Forward used to be the rage...not so much the movie, but the idea...rather than paying someone “back” for a kindness rendered to you, you bestowed a tangible act of kindness to someone “ahead” of you. Paying it forward was a way to acknowledge grace received by **offering grace** to someone else. Instead of *returning* a favour, you **gave** favour to someone in need as recognition of your new circumstance in being blessed.

“I baptize you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” John the Baptist declared a new reality has arrived...John proclaims God is ushering in a new world; a new circumstance in which God is setting all things right & the best response is preparation...*PAY IT FORWARD*

“What then should we do?” Live now like that new reality is at hand. Live now recognizing your new circumstance as part of God's new order of things. Not in Mount Everest-sized feats of spiritual strength, but generosity, fairness, kindness... the very things anyone can do. Live now in the life-giving power of the Spirit & the cleansing refining fire of God's presence & power...acknowledge grace received by **offering grace** to someone else.

This year God wants to give so much more than a temporary fix to the deep longings in our hearts. God actually longs to have us whole & healed, at peace & content, allowing his joy & especially hope in Him to lead us through each day.

We'll experience that together today...and we'll listen as we pray & light the 3rd candle on the Advent Wreath.

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of all creation, be for us now & always the solid foundation upon which we build our daily lives. Align our lives to the word and life of Jesus Christ, the Cornerstone. Heavenly Father...we can find a day full of reasons to be worried... anxious...fearful...but we have one reason for hope – Your love for us in Jesus & his victory over all that would steal, kill & destroy the joy & praise you intend as our daily experience. Establish that hope in our hearts by your Spirit. Hold us tightly in your presence so that nothing in this world or anything to come can take from us our assurance in your will for us as your people.

Direct our eyes to your purposes beyond us & to the world around us so that in all things we see you present in joy & hope in all things & at all times. Grant us the unwavering assurance of your victory over sin and death & your open arms waiting to embrace us today & forever.

Come Lord Jesus! We turn to you, in readiness for all things to be made new!

Someone light the Advent Wreath

*O come now living water pour your grace,
And bring new life to ev'ry withered place;
Speak comfort to each trembling heart:
“Be strong! Fear not, for I will ne'er depart.”
Rejoice, rejoice! Take heart and do not fear,
God's chosen one, Immanuel, draws near.*

Let it be in us according to your eternal promise in Jesus... Amen.

Let's hear God's word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. Given the circumstances in our world, how does hope play a role in your day?
OR does it?
2. What is one thing you are asking God to accomplish in your life this Christmas?

3rd Sunday in Advent '22 A – EXPERIENCE CHRISTMAS: HOLD THE HOPE

On Sat, 26th Nov sometime around 1 in the afternoon, Pr Jim Crowweller had the privilege of declaring a new reality had been brought into being. He stood in front of folks gathered in the church/on-line & said something like “It’s my honour to introduce Mr/Mrs Aaron & Charis Berthon.” Of course cheers/shouts of joy erupted I managed to keep Leonie contained. He was right. What previously *did NOT* exist *DID*.

Another Pr; Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes it this way speaking to a bride & groom: “In His unfathomable condescension God adds His ‘Yes’ to yours; & by doing so, God creates out of your love something quite new: the holy estate of matrimony.” What was previously only a man & a woman, by the promises they make & the affirmation of the Father, God creates a marriage. What did not exist, now does. What God established in the garden ^{b/i} man/woman, the community celebrates in worship where God adds his “Yes,” & the couple consummates in private is *something quite new—the holy estate of matrimony* – only under those circumstances do we find “marriage.”

Same thing happens when the Dr/midwife says, “it’s a girl/boy!” Pregnancy instantly becomes parenthood. Father & mother appear like “that!” But it’s not just that a new reality – new circumstances arrive...It’s a new existence that calls for/demands a new way of living. Old habits patterns & practices must give way to new. The old way of seeing & living in the world have to be discarded for a new perspective worldview approach to even the simplest smallest parts of life.

“I baptize you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to be his slave & untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit & with fire.” John the Baptist declared a new reality has arrived...John proclaims God is ushering in a new world; a new circumstance in which God is setting all things right...& from now on nothing can remain the same. It’s a new existence that calls for/demands a new way of living. Old habits patterns & practices must give way to new. The old way of seeing & living in the world have to be discarded for a new perspective worldview approach to even the simplest smallest parts of life.

John is entrusted ^{w/} the good news that the world is about to meet in real life in real flesh the Son of God who will give up heaven & come to earth to live ^{w/} & love humankind – be tortured – crucified – buried – raised from death – to forgive my sin & yours – to pour his love & his Spirit into my heart & yours – to make my life & yours like his & share his power & abundance ^{w/} me/you now & forever. John doesn’t fully understand it all at this point...& even when Jesus shows up & John is imprisoned, soon to be beheaded, he sends his disciples asking “Are you the One...or...?” But John knows, has known since he “leapt” in Elizabeth’s womb, that this One Coming, Jesus, is

God’s final fulfillment of all the ancient promises. John announces **God** is bringing a new world...world of forgiveness, justice, joy in community, love, peace, & life... in complete fullness/wholeness. John steps from the wilderness ^{w/} a word of hope.

The gospel authors all see John as the last of the prophets declaring that the great restoration of all things is underway. And that restoration is desperately needed because John sees around him what we see in ourselves or all around us: “*Brood of snakes!*” John is not calling names here or exaggerating to make a point. Every last one of us bears the stain of the serpent. Every cm² of the universe is broken, damaged, tainted by the human rebellion in the garden & perpetuated by you & me...everyone ever since. **Given** the circumstances in our world, how does hope play a role in your day? OR does it? There are days when I don’t see good outcomes in this world on the horizon. I just sense it will get worse ^{b/4} it gets better if it ever does.

The world in which we live is a hard place – sin, injustice, exploitation, lies, violence, degradation & death. The homeless & hungry multiply around us. Kids wander the streets every night because home is a horror & who knows if your Super will be worth anything when you finally need it. Disaster piles upon disaster & I won’t even start on the personal stuff...that tears at your heart & steals your peace. When gov’ts suggest medically assisted suicide as the cure for what ails you...When followers of Jesus (who have brought to the world the highest & most widespread levels of education, prosperity, health & wellness, justice, relief from poverty & hunger) are seen as the baddies...who must be silenced & driven from the public square...

Even now the axe of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down & thrown into the fire.” At the very heart of John’s preaching is the striking truth: our attitudes, values, & behaviours bear consequences. To go along ^{w/} or stand silent in the face of dishonesty, injustice, exploitation, violence, or ways of living contrary to God’s clear word is to live the quicksand existence of those evils...reap the result & wrath of evil We can expect our personal lives, & our social worlds to be shattered by the very evils we enjoy or do not resist.

“**What** then should we do?” In the face of the new reality...the new world of justice, forgiveness, joy in community, love, peace, & life...in complete fullness/wholeness what should we do? How should we live? If this new existence calls for/demands a new way of living...what is it? If old habits/patterns/practices must give way to new; what are they? If the old way of seeing & living in the world has to be discarded for a new perspective worldview approach to even the simplest smallest parts of life... how do I do it?

Two things jump out immediately...Who asks the question? Who is it that feels the weight of the sinful world crushing them & simultaneously crumbling beneath their feet? Who gets it that rats get fat while good men die? The **crowds** – **corrupt tax collectors** (as if there are any other kind) – **soldiers**. Let that sink in...the crowds the rabble & riff raff...the poor w/ barely a pot to pee in or a window to throw it out of. Who'd been told over & over again by the rich, religious, & those with connections that they'd never amount to a hill of beans & even God had forgotten their name. Despised tax collectors who profit from exploiting their countrymen who too had been told to forget God ever hearing their prayers again. Mercenary occupying soldiers known for extorting the vulnerable...bathed in blood & battle & brutality. Evidently, as John proclaims the advent of a new world **no one** is to be excluded. **None** are so bad or so broken that the new reality advances over their dead bodies. **ALL** are invited into new life! *John used many such warnings as he announced the Good News to the people.* John instructs, rather than condemns, the lowly poor, the corrupt tax collector, & the bare knuckled mercenary. John preaches to all which **means**... Jesus comes for all.

Luke quotes Isaiah *"all flesh shall see the salvation of God,"* (3:6) & he really means it... Of course that's good news...As John proclaims the advent of a new world no one is to be excluded. None are so bad or so broken that the new reality advances over their dead bodies. **ALL** are invited into new life!

"What then should we do?" What a great question...John's instructions **seem** anti-climactic: generosity fairness kindness. Even I can do that. As messed up as our world often seems & as messed up as we often perceive our own lives to **be...** Faithfulness does not have to be heroic. You will most likely not be called to rush into a burning school to save the children or bring Dan Andrews to faith in Christ. But there are opportunities to do God's will, to be God's people, to give witness to his kingdom in Jesus Christ all around us. I was re-reading part of Exodus this past week... Moses is arguing w/ God about his capability for leading God's people out of Egypt to the land God has promised to give them. Moses gives every possible excuse until God in divine frustration asks, *"What is in your hand?"* (**Ex 4:2**) It's his shepherd's staff. You know the story, God allows Moses to use his most familiar tool (& his brother Aaron) to demonstrate God's power to save. What's in your hand? Use that. What do you do best? Do that. Generosity fairness kindness...compassion companionship time... (find your Aaron) Our opportunities are shaped by the places we find ourselves & the needs of the neighbor right b/4 us. Make no mistake, opportunities abound & every time we respond to the grace we have received by giving grace to someone else we reveal faith trust & hope that this new reality has arrived & God will meet all our

needs as he has met our most desperate need in Jesus...crucified...risen...ruling over all things in grace/mercy...present & at work in us by the Spirit.

"What then should we do?" Pay it forward! Live now like that new reality is at hand...because it is. Live now recognizing your new circumstance as part of God's new order of things. You are God's beloved. You are redeemed in Christ. You enjoy *every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because (you) are united w/ Christ.* (Eph 1:3) Not in Mount Everest-sized feats of spiritual strength, but generosity, fairness, kindness...compassion companionship time the things in your hand – the very things anyone can do in the ordinary stuff of their lives. Live now in the life-giving power of the Spirit & the cleansing refining fire of God's presence... acknowledge grace **received by offering grace** to someone else. In doing that, you hold to the hope the new reality in Christ provides. **You** are not being asked to change the world, but to live the hope of Jesus in your ordinary life, which will transform the world.

Hope...future certainty grounded in a present reality...being grounded in this fundamental truth: God will have the last word about me/you/the world & that word is a word of grace & abundance & joy & love & life & peace...because of the reality of the risen reigning Jesus Christ..

Hope begins & ends in the embrace of Jesus...God wants to give so much more than a temporary fix to the deep longings in our hearts. God actually longs to have us whole & healed, at peace & content, allowing his joy & especially hope in Him to lead us through each day. Remember: You are not being asked to change the world but to live the hope of Jesus in your ordinary life, which will transform the world.

TAKE IT HOME -

Where will you this week use "what is in your hand" to "pay it forward," as a sign of the hope you have within you?

Let's pray...