

E-votion in Print for December 4, 2013

Dear Friends,

Today I am reading Matthew 3:1-12



In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather girdle around his waist and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor': for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Devotional Message:

This coming Sunday will be our second Sunday in Advent, preparing us for the coming of the Lord. And preparing for the Lord to come is not as easy as we might think it is. At least I don't think it is particularly easy. Every year at Advent (and at other times as well) I have to unlearn some of my old preconceived ideas--cleanse myself, so to speak-- to see what the Scriptures REALLY say about God's act in Jesus of Nazareth. Our culture has snatched away much of the meaning of the birth of Jesus Christ. I want to reclaim the true meaning of the birth of Jesus so I can be ready for his coming.

Lots of churches focus on John the Baptist and preparing the way for the coming of the Lord. John the Baptist is fiery, he is radical, he is scary. I read a church sign this morning that said, "The rapture will soon be here. Reserved seats required." YOOOWWWW... But it is statements like that that remind me of John the Baptist.

John the Baptist had ONE message. "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand." John was back to basics. He was not boring. I bet his sermons were long but no one was sleeping while he was preaching. He drew large crowds, we think. I imagine that his sermons were genuine, compelling, and prophet like, and people did not sit on the back row. :)

How does John the Baptist fit into our plans for Christmas? WE usually want peace at Christmas. We hope to observe a cease-fire from the stresses and strains of our lives. Our Christmas cards do not usually say "the chaff is being burned in an unquenchable fire. Repent for the Lord is at hand." Instead, they say, "May you make room for the Christ child in your heart this Christmas."

John may have been a prophet ahead of his time. The first coming of the Messiah did not eradicate evil from the world. John holds out hope for God's continuing work in creation, even now. Maybe we don't want to put John's sermon on a Christmas card, but we would certainly celebrate if evil was destroyed once and for all. Let us be thankful to John for helping us to understand what we celebrate this season of Advent. Let us hold on to the promise of a time when the peaceable kingdom comes to earth.

Please pray:

- for John Fry who will have surgery Friday.
- for Kirby Sampson (Bonnie Sampson's granddaughter)
- for Maurice Whittamore, (resident of Johnson City) father of my college roommate Karen Whittamore.
- for our church
- for those who are lonely and lost this season
- for our loved ones.
- *Please pray and help if you can. We are about \$45,000 below our projected 2013 budget. October and November offerings were very low--the lowest in about 5 years. If you have overlooked your pledge, please try to make it up. If you are able, please help us meet our budget so that we can start 2014 in a positive cash flow position. God has blessed us all in so many ways. Let us be a blessing to others with our tithes and offerings.*

Announcements:

- 12/5 8 AM Finance Committee
- 12/8 10:30 Children's program
- 12/8 5:30-7 Taste of 1st Methodist, bring a new toy for a boy or girl. These will go to our new toy shop for food pantry clients.
- 12/14 UMW Christmas Luncheon and the Food Pantry Toy Shop 1-3 pm
- 12/15 Christmas Cantata at 10:30 service and the Reindeer Run (ELC) at 3 pm

"Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words." St Francis of Assisi

Blessings,
Jane Taylor,
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