

## What Shall We Do?

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year B: Advent 3: Luke 3:7-18

<sup>7</sup> John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.”

<sup>10</sup> And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” <sup>11</sup> In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” <sup>12</sup> Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” <sup>13</sup> He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” <sup>14</sup> Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

<sup>15</sup> As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, <sup>16</sup> John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

<sup>18</sup> So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

*‘What shall we do?’ When we realign ourselves with God’s ideals of justice, then our lives demonstrate and embody God’s Good News for all.*

What shall we do? Three times the people ask John the same question. When a Bible text repeats something multiple times, it’s like a blinking red light at an intersection! Stop! Pay attention. This is important.

Last weekend we talked about how repentance in Luke/Acts is not about shaping up or shipping out. Rather it is about a reframing of God’s work in our lives in the present moment. It can be an awareness and recognition of God’s will unfolding before us.

We know the scene. John the Baptist, hairy and unkempt is preaching in the wilderness. It certainly is part of God's unfolding will and plan. At first glance it seems he is yelling. Yelling because his words are harsh particularly in those first verses where he is addressing the Jews. At that point in time, if you were a Jew, you believed that God wouldn't pass judgement on you, because you were of God's chosen people. They were the favored people of course and that meant safety from any judgment on God's part.

Hence, 'don't think just because Abraham was your forebearer, you get a free pass!' Racial privilege means nothing to God. For God welcomes all. But John was asking the Jews to be baptized, just as Gentiles would have when they wanted to convert to Judaism. That had to be a little hard for them to swallow.

What's fascinating to me is the question the crowd (including Jews and Gentiles) ask next. "What shall we do?" John's fiery and urgent language doesn't seem to anger them or convince them to go back to town. No. Instead, their interest is piqued. What shall we do?

Asking questions is a sign of spiritual hunger and a sign of God's unfolding will and plan. Now, John gets down to brass tacks with a simple rule of thumb that everyone can understand and follow.

First, share your clothes and food with those who have less.  
Second, live out your calling – whatever it is - with integrity.  
Third, don't abuse the power of your job, don't be a bully.

Easy enough, yes?

A cartoon showed a skeptic looking up into the heavens saying, "God if you are up there, tell us what we should do!"

A voice answers back, "Feed the hungry, house the homeless, establish justice!"

The sceptic looks alarmed. "Ahh, just testing," he says.

"Me too," replies the voice.

John's social Gospel message reinforced the message that a life of faith was to be lived through action. Not sitting on one's easy chair being content with much while others have none. He didn't encourage the tax collectors to leave their jobs,

working for the oppressors. He told the Jewish soldiers working for Herod the same, only to both, don't extort people. Have integrity within your calling, within your heart.

1. Share with the poor. 2. Have integrity in your calling. 3. Don't be a bully. Sounds a little more like Kindergarten rules than the Gospel, huh? Last Tuesday was Colorado Gives Day with donations more than half way to 55 million dollars. Those causes, organizations now have more to spend helping others; to share with those in need.

Integrity in your calling. Anyone can do this. Don't take what's not ours to take. Be honest in word and deed. When company morals lean toward ethics that aren't ours, pray about what could be your faithful response. Even when it might mean getting in trouble.

Finally, don't be a bully. If we have power, we use it for the good of others, not for selfish gain. We lift up those around us rather than putting them down. We can notice and be kind to those who never get noticed. Leave a tip for our hotel cleaning maid. Thanking the lab tech for their kindness when drawing our blood. Noticing the wait staff is overwhelmed and then pausing to really notice them. You and I wield much more power than we think we do.

Did you notice that paired with the Gospel today, is the lesson from Philippians 4? Rejoice in the Lord always. How is it that rejoicing could come alongside doing what it right and honorable in lifting up the poor, the least, the last and the lost?

Because... 'all spiritual advance begins with a turning away from what is hindering our obedience.' (N.T.Wright. Luke for Everyone. Westminster, John Knox Press. Louisville, KY. 2004. Pg34.)

Obedience? Obedience? That's like a four letter word in this day and age. We are independent people! We don't have to answer to anyone, right? Hmmm.

All spiritual advance begins with a turning away from what is hindering our obedience. My Dad loved to go up and down the parking lot aisles in the wrong direction, just for fun. And well, just to make Mom a little crazy. The arrow would be pointing one direction, and he'd go the opposite. He'd never do it in a full parking lot. But regularly when there were more than a few cars present. I can still hear her say, "Dick, Dick! You're going to get us in an accident!" "What, what? I didn't see an arrow." He'd just smile a tiny smile, do it in another aisle

before amending his behavior. The fun was over for him, but at least it made her happy.

Now that's a silly example. But the point remains. When we are doing what we know God desires of us, then we are happy. We're content because we're not living to impress anyone else but God. We can be obedient like Jesus was obedient. Like John was obedient. And Mary, and Zechariah, and Paul, and Peter and all the other men and women in the Bible who showed us how to show up and live the faith through actions. Obedience sounds tough, but it is spiritual freedom for we who know the joy it brings.

Luke says, 'John preached the Good News.' It was good news. Good news for those who receive what they needed to live comfortably and good news for those who truly were committing to their new Baptismal call as children of God.

A spiritual life is a life about action. Worship. Prayer. Living simply so others can simply live. Obeying God with heart, soul, mind and strength. Doing what John was asking the crowds to do...commit to this Baptismal life with God...so that others can live.

What is hindering your and my spiritual obedience? Let's ask God this week, "What shall we do?"  
Amen.