

THE JOY OF BEARING FRUITS OF REPENTANCE



Reading:

Luke 3:10-14 (NLT)

(Assign someone to read.)

"The crowds asked, 'What should we do?' John replied, 'If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry.' Even corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized and asked, 'Teacher, what should we do?' He replied, 'Collect no more taxes than the government requires.' 'What should we do?' asked some soldiers. John replied, 'Don't extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay.'

On this third Sunday of Advent, we again hear John the Baptist's voice, answering an important question from the crowd he had already called to repentance. The crowd understood John's prophetic call for ethical reform and true repentance rooted in justice. "What should we do?" they asked John the Baptist—a question that also echoes for us today.

It's notable that while the other Gospels broadly describe John's preaching without specific details, Luke elaborates on John's practical responses concerning how we should relate to one another. To John, anyone not living a life of justice and righteousness toward their neighbor needs to repent before God.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

This question is asked by three distinct groups in Luke's account: the crowds (v. 10), the corrupt tax collectors (v. 12), and some soldiers (v. 14).

These groups genuinely wanted to know what they needed to do to show true repentance. At that time, repentance was often expressed through outward acts like wearing sackcloth and ashes or offering sacrifices.

John, however, challenged this understanding, saying repentance must be shown through the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself.

John's responses address the theme of justice in relationships. To the crowd, he says: "If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry."

This is a clear and direct invitation for us today to share what we have with those who have less. To the tax collectors, he replies: "Collect no more taxes than the government requires."

In other words, don't exploit others—perform your duties justly and use your position to help those who come to you seeking fairness. To the soldiers, he says: "Don't extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay."

John warns against abusing power for personal gain or using falsehoods to harm others. John's responses focus on individual needs rather than societal problems, reminding us that transforming society begins with the individual—with each of us.

The first step in redeeming our society is for those who have more to share with those who have less; for those in positions of power to use their authority to promote justice and the common good; and for those in privileged roles to advocate for those without a voice.

On this third Sunday of Advent, John invites us to experience the joy that comes from bearing fruits of true repentance. In an individualistic society where the powerful often exploit others, where justice can be hard to find in courts, and where abuse in society is rampant, John calls us to begin individually by loving our neighbor as ourselves.

This love must manifest itself through tangible actions for our neighbor, starting with those in our homes.

As Dr. Justo L. González notes, Luke and Acts emphasize social justice and sharing with those in need, as seen in the early church's example described in Acts: "There were no needy persons among them" (Acts 4:34).

Let us listen to John's voice as he concretely describes what true repentance means, a repentance that brings joy to our lives: "If you have two shirts, give one to the poor."

If you have food, share it with those who are hungry"; "Collect no more taxes than the government requires"; "Don't extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay."

PREPARE TO WORSHIP

Turn off all the lights and light the candles from the first two weeks.

The third Advent candle is the Shepherds' Candle (pink), symbolizing the JOY we express by treating those around us with justice. This joy is found in serving one another. It is the joy announced to a group of shepherds—society's invisible members at the time—who were the first to hear the great news of God's incarnation in Jesus, a news that would bring great joy to all humanity.

Today, regardless of the adverse
circumstances surrounding us, we can worship like the
shepherds and feel

JOY
as they did.

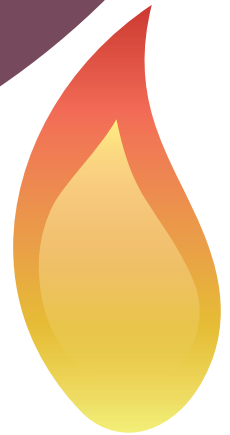
Light this week's candle a pink one.

The Advent journey now shines with three candles (Hope, Peace, Joy), illuminating our path toward celebrating the birth of the Son of God, our Lord and Savior. Today more than ever, we must remember that even when the journey is challenging and dark, the light of the Christ Child will accompany and guide us. His presence fills us with encouragement, and His salvation brings us JOY and hope.

He is Emmanuel—God with us—and that alone is reason enough for His joy to be fulfilled in us. Let us remember today that “the joy of the Lord is our strength.” AMEN.

Extinguish the candles.

Conclude with a prayer together. Assign someone to lead the prayer.



Bibliography

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