

Sunday December 16 through Sunday December 23

- ◆ Pastor Robert continues his sermon series on this Third Sunday of Advent. Robert hopes to help us recognize the Seeds of Redemption.
- ◆ The UMYF will still be hosting the meal for the rescheduled United Methodist Men's meeting at 6:30 pm on Monday.
- ◆ Katie Shupe's Christmas Pop Up Bakery will be open from 2 pm until 6 pm on Wednesday . Stop by and check out the goodies that are being sold for the holidays.
- ◆ Prayer team and Choir practice will be Wednesday evening.
- ◆ A Union Primary School class will be having their Christmas Party, Thursday morning at 10 am.
- ◆ Saturday is Day of Giving and there is an event at the Visitor Center.
- ◆ The Fourth Sunday of Advent will continue with The Fruit of Expectation.



This WEEK at Trinity

OFFICE: (276) 523-0789
trinityumc.bsg@gmail.com

Sunday December 16

Third Sunday of Advent
10:00 am—10:45 am Sunday School
11:00 am—12:00 pm Morning Worship
1:30 pm—Coffee for the Betrothed
5:00 pm—UMYF

Monday December 17

6:30 pm—UMM Meeting
7:00 pm—Boy Scouts

Tuesday December 18

2:00— pm—Katie's Pop Up Bakery
7:00 pm—Girl Scouts

Wednesday December 19

6:00 pm—Prayer Team
7:00 pm—Choir Practice

Thursday December 20

10:00 am—Ashley Bowen's Christmas party

Friday December 21

9:00 am—MEOC in Fellowship Hall

Saturday December 22

No Scheduled Activities

Sunday December 23

Fourth Sunday of Advent
10:00 am—10:45 am Sunday School
11:00 am—12:00 pm Morning Worship
12:00 pm—Board of Trustees meeting

Seeds of Redemption

John the Baptist sounds like a few of the preachers I remember from my childhood. Or does he? Have we heard John's message of prevenient grace? Or have we only heard the interpretations based on Hell Fire and Damnation? My family was twofers. We attended Church twice a year. Well, some years. Christmas and Easter the preacher warned, "Flee from the wrath to come." So, we did, at least for a few years, but then God's Spirit called again. The only place we knew to go to was Church. So...we returned hoping to learn how to live in the Kingdom of Heaven. Is this John's message?

The word wrath stirs up all kinds of violence. The root of God's wrath is seen and heard by the Israelite people in Exodus 20:5. "You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me." Jealousy is protective of one's possessions. Think about a predator actively harming your child. What would you do free your child from that predator? This is the image John proclaims to prepare the way of the Lord. Do we know the difference between the predator and God's Children?

To repent means to turn! John would have us turn away from the predator. Turn to God, the Father. Turn from fear to mercy. Turn from slavery to grace. Turn from wrath to the authority and power of unconditional love. John's message says, "Stop running, hiding, shaming and blaming." He taught people how to produce fruit in keeping with repentance. The fruit of the New Life Direction is mercy, grace, and love. The fruit of repentance illumines the darkness of life with the light of Hope, Love, and JOY.

John's message says your life matters. God is jealous for you. God desires your presence, communion, and love. It is a glorious message! Who doesn't want to live a life that matters? "Black Lives Matter!" The "Me Too" Movement people matter! All lives matter because all people are created in God's image. All lives are redeemed by God through Jesus Christ. God poured His Holy Spirit out on all people. Unfortunately, the human sinful condition drives preachers and Church people to focus more on escaping Hell than teaching how to produce the fruit of repentance.

Too many people hear the word repent and think: "Oh, the preacher wants me to go to the altar, publicly say everything I ever did wrong, and rise to my feet a worthless wretch." No wonder my family were twofers. We were escape artist! Is it any wonder that the best age to get a person to the altar is between 10 and 15 years old? They are sold out on being "right and good," not fruitful. Is it any wonder that the second best age to get a person to the altar is about 50 years old? The fifty year old is worn out from being an escape artist. They want their life to matter, especially when faced with death, disease, depression, and economic loss. Is it any wonder that this age group is fleeing the church at an alarming pace?

John's message taught escape artist how to BE fruitful people whose lives mattered. He taught ordinary people, IRS employees, and soldiers how to BE fruitful, Kingdom of God people. These people went to the wilderness to ask John, "What must I do?" Did you hear that? The people went to the wilderness, not the temple! Is this why the organized Church declines in attendance? Are we seeing people flee to the wilderness looking for John?

Listen very carefully to how John instructed the people. The people asked what they must DO. John tells them WHO to BE to be restored to the image of God. Be empathetic! Be humble! Be Patient!

John teaches us to be empathetic: If you have two coats and your neighbor has none, give one away. If you have food for today and enough for tomorrow too, give your hungry neighbor one meal. Empathy gets us to turn and see our neighbor as self. Empathy remembers what it felt like to be cold or hungry, depressed, addicted... Empathy teaches us to see neighbor as self! Look at the cross and see if Jesus has empathy for you!

John teaches us to be humble: He told the tax collectors not to take more than required. Taxes are used to shape and form communities, states, and nations. Notice that John moves us from being empathetic individuals to form humble empathetic communities. Once our eyes are opened to have empathy for one of God's children, we soon see the whole community. Look at the cross and see if Jesus humbled himself!

John teaches us to be patient. He told the soldiers not to accuse their neighbor falsely. Soldiers protect our communities, states, and nations. John's message warns that a nation should never turn on its on people. In other words, empathy and humility teaches us that true power is patience! We obviously struggle with patience because we lack empathy and humility. Look at the cross and see if Jesus was patient with individuals, tax collectors, religious authorities, and governments.

The world creates structures that take power and authority over the distribution of "coats, food, money, mercy, prescription drugs, and freedom." These structures are right and good and helpful. John envisions such centers as training grounds where individuals practice empathy, humility, and patience. When we allow these structures to do it for us, we soon become slaves to their authority and power. They lord over us.

Look at what has happened to our children! We have four or five generations suffering from addictions and poverty. We can't build prisons fast enough. Government housing cannot keep up with homelessness. We fund more programs. And...they are right and good. But how about faithful?

Jesus said, repent, go, and follow. Writing a check, bringing coats and food, paying utility bills and other things for distribution is right and good. But what about faithful? Faithfulness calls us to one on one interaction. One on one interaction with our neighbor teaches us empathy, humility, and patience. If we all engage our neighbor with such mercy, grace, and love we will soon see our community rise in New Life. Such a community is what Paul called the Church.

I pray for joy to the world. But if I pray for joy, the Word must become a lamp unto my feet and light unto my path. My neighbor is in my path. The thing I appreciate about the people of Big Stone Gap is their willingness to stop, sit, and talk about life and the Lord. What a training ground! What a place to BE faithful in the midst of so much to do.

One in Christ,

Robert