

## Luke 3 1-20

A word of God came to John, son of Zecharias in the desert. Like the very old days, when the word of God came to Jeremiah or Ezekiel or Joel. A word of God came to John in the desert.

It came from the living God. The God who is before Tiberius Caesar and Pontius Pilate and any tetrarch or high priest. They have their memos and rulings and judgments and tax hikes. This is a word from the God who is before them and after them. From eternity to eternity, the everlasting God. Your creator and mine.

The living God gave a message to John in the desert. Away from people and politics. The desert or the wilderness or the back country has always been a place to get away from people and politics and be refreshed by God.

God gave John a message, pointed and strong, for all the people, little and big, important or not. John (unlike Jonah) took that message all over the country around the Jordan, he preached the message until they locked him up in prison. Away from the fresh, wild country where God had spoken to him.

Luke tells us that John was like the old prophet Isaiah. So God is on the move, like when he brought the people back from exile. If you are a careful listener, you might have noticed something. In Isaiah 40, the voice says, "prepare a way in the desert for the Lord". The journey back home is going to go through all the rough places, so level them out. Luke tweaks that to say that the voice is crying in the wilderness and from there the Lord is coming to his people. In Luke 4 Jesus does exactly that.

Just because John liked to be in the desert away from people does not mean he was shy. Or maybe the message God gave him was so strong in him that he cannot be silent. Jeremiah says, "If I say I will not mention him anymore or speak anymore in his name, his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in, indeed I cannot. (20:9)

Maybe it was like that for John.

His message is this: The living God says, "Stop, turn around!"

"Stop all that sin that everyone thinks is just the way life is. Stop going with the flow".

"Repent" means. Turn around. You are going the wrong way.

"Repent". "The axe is at the root of the trees. A fire is coming to burn up chaff".

That is John's message.

He baptized people. To be baptized has always meant to ceremonially go under water where you cannot live, and to leave your sins behind in that dead place and rise up to life and forgiveness. We believe that about baptism even when we baptize babies with sprinkling. Always a powerful, beautiful spiritual experience.

John went everywhere calling people to stop, turn around and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins from God.

That is the first part of the message to you and me today. Stop going with the flow, stop sinning just like the rest of the world and receive the forgiveness of God

through Jesus Christ. If you have not been baptized, then be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins.

The living God is on the move. All people will see the salvation of God.

Crowds are coming.

John greets them with these beautiful words.

“You brood of vipers!”

He says they are like snakes in the grass trying to get out of the way of a brush fire.

What is that about?

At first it might seem that John has been in the desert a bit too long. But I think the clues are in the text for us. It says “as people were coming to him to be baptized...” but it does not say anything about their repenting or their asking for forgiveness. So maybe it was like this.... Levi repented of his sins, and was baptized. He came home and told the neighbours about how cool it was to be baptized. They started to think, “hey, I wonder what that would be like.....” but they didn’t think about repenting.

After all, “I am a child of Abraham” “I am part of the covenant people of God”..”I’ve been baptized, I’ve made profession of faith, my parents were.... my grand parents were.....

Big deal!

Don't think that status counts for squat before God. If anything, we are held to a higher standard than the world because we should know better.

God is not fooled. We can't even say, "I'm saved by grace". We are saved by grace through faith, but faith, real faith always shows itself in our actions.

So what we are talking about here is a re-orientation, a change of direction in our lives.

It's from trust in self to trust in God. It's from grasping for **me**, to trusting that God will provide. That's the inner change.

On the outside it is a change from greed to generosity.

Greedy behaviour might just be the most basic problem of our world. Greed that is willing to go beyond the boundaries becomes corruption as leaders and those with power take what they want.

I am not the first person and not the last to say that the world financial crisis can be traced straight to corruption. The devastation of Haiti is only the most recent suffering of that country. They have been hit by hurricanes too. But the corruption of leadership has compounded every natural disaster over the last two hundred years. In recent years they have better government but they have years of corruption to overcome.

God calls you and me to shift from a trust in ourselves and a grasping for ourselves to trusting in him and living a life of generosity.

To be clear. If you are thinking of joining this church or making profession of faith, we are not just asking you to show up on Sunday. We are not asking you to agree with your head that Jesus is Lord. We are asking you to give your life away, to share the life God has given you with the people here and with our community. Part of that is financial, but only a part. And if you are not willing to do that, keep moving.

When the people get what John is talking about, they have one question.

“What should we do?”

It is the question that comes up in us when we really get God. Or, when God gets us.

“What shall we do?”

So, I hope that we are asking that question this morning.

First, I will give you John’s answer to the people:

“Share”.

“Don’t rip people off because you can get away with it, or if they will never be able to do anything about it.”

“Don’t use your power to your own advantage”

“Be content with your pay”.

And then, to Herod, he says, “don’t take people that God is not giving you”.  
Herod had ditched his wife and took his brother Philip’s wife.”

What should we do?

“Share. Share. Share.

Put all our trust in the Lord and live out that change from greed to generosity.

“Stop buying stuff that you don’t need”. (eg clothes, ‘what should I wear’,  
'better and better Tvs....etc, etc)

“Don’t abuse your employee discount”.

Don’t take **people** that God is not giving you. One of the things that concerns me as your pastor is to see some of you dating people who are not walking in the same life direction as you say you are. Why would God give you that person?

Haiti is before us today. We will have an offering. Haiti also is an opportunity to check our inner orientation. What happens in us when we hear of that great disaster? And then, of course, what are we **doing** to help those in need?

May the Lord be gracious to you.

May the Lord be gracious to me.

And all God’s people said,

Amen