



Advent Week 3 – Sunday 12th December 2021.

Scripture: Isaiah 12:2-6 &

Luke 3:7-18

You may think our Scripture today has nothing to do with Advent and the birth of Jesus. I hope to help you see that it is very how relevant.

Today's opening verse may lead you to raise your eyebrows – you brood of vipers, you bunch of snakes!

Why is John all worked up? What reaction did John want to invoke in his hearers? Why is he pushing back at those who follow him? What can we learn from their persistence in seeking John's counsel?

In Genesis the snake is a deceiver and a liar who attacks the character of God and Adam and Eve's sense of identity. The snake appeals to their ego and pride and leads them down a path away from their creator.

Could John be hinting that he sees who they really are and that they are deceived about themselves.?

Can you picture the crowd's body language for a response like that?

Whoa, hang on a minute here! What should we do? If we weren't supposed to follow you out here and undertake baptism, then what do you want from us?

The Gospel message this morning reminds us that God's plan entails response. As we wait, we are reminded that we are to respond. Our scripture contains some of the behaviours we should show if we take up the lifestyle of authentic children of Abraham.

John is saying – this is not for show. Don't come running just to escape punishment, you must get ready for a change in your behaviour.

Baptism is about a cycle – as you enter the waters in your normal life, you undergo repentance. As you emerge from the waters, your life is changing – you will behave and align yourself with God's purposes in the world.

Those of you who are Christians, do you remember when you first were saved? Do you remember how exciting it was? Do you remember when you were first filled with the Holy Spirit, how exciting it was? Do you remember how much in love with Jesus you were? It seemed like there was a fountain of living water just bubbling out of you. Remember?

What happened? Do you still have joy and exuberance or has that disappeared over time?

For those of you who have undergone baptism – did you take it seriously? Did you fully repent and are serving God in the way that brings His kingdom here on earth?

Or was it just an empty act and you haven't fully released yourself to God's indwelling Spirit to change?

John saw some in the crowd had not changed and were deceiving themselves. It is not hard even today, to recognise some whose behaviour has not changed at all. God encourages – but we must take the steps to change.

If your joy is no longer there, then this means you have stopped drinking from the fountain of life! You need to take another drink! You stopped eating the Bread of Life, you need to eat!

We must be careful not to consider it worship just because we showed up at church. Just because we went into a building designated for worship doesn't mean we worshiped. No, we need to learn to worship in "spirit and in truth." That means we need to come into the presence of God in complete sincerity and complete honesty.

The Jewish leaders were deceiving not only those around them, but also themselves when John called them to repent and be baptized. Their response was – we don't need to repent or be baptized because we are sons of Abraham. That may be true, but their actions spoke much louder than their words. You cannot lie your way into the presence of God and expect to get away with it.

John challenges their excuses by responding: What should you do – share – share a coat, share some food, don't extort others out of their money, be satisfied with your wages, acknowledge your sins, don't puff yourselves up.

You may have read this passage before and concluded – this is not about me. I don't collect money and if I did, I wouldn't cheat people.

I don't have opportunities to extort others. I am not a viper, I am earnest in my repentance. But that is not truly the case. I am sure we can all recognise similar behaviour in our lives.

We are told not only to share food, clothing and money, but show love, have compassion and show respect.

We are all sinners and need repentance and forgiveness. We need to recognise the times where we fail, when we sin and to bring these to God for cleansing and help to change.

Do you want God to touch you; feed you; quench your thirst?

Do you want God to move supernaturally in your life; to bring spiritual excitement back into your life?

Do you want more of God - then you need to get right with God!

You need to confess your sins and change your lifestyle. Get serious about church – don't be here just to play church. God wants us to worship Him in Spirit and Truth.

If you want more of God, then come to the front and seek His face.

Come get a drink, the fountain is flowing.

The figure of John the Baptist reminds us of a radical way of life, oriented starkly against the status quo, and aimed instead towards God. John assertively lets the people know that repentance and baptism do not ensure they avoid God's wrath without changing.

The people in this passage were waiting for the Messiah and they were thinking – perhaps John is the Messiah. They were seeking and that is why they asked – what then should we do? Wait expectantly for the true Messiah – Jesus to return. This is the good news. We need to seek repentance and look for Christ in all that we do. We need to have an active response to what God's requires of us.

As we draw near to Christmas and the needs of many are dropped on our doorstep, let's give and not judge a person because they don't donate, hold on to their pain, find it difficult to take action for themselves; or because of where they live; or their culture, gender, sexuality, clothes, even because they like cats more than dogs – hmm not sure about that one.

Let's first see their needs and with God's help they have the ability to change and grow if they choose.

Closing Prayer:

The Scriptures were written to teach and encourage us, so that we might have hope.

Let us glorify God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us accept one another just as Christ accepted us.

Christ became a servant so that the promises made to God's people might be confirmed.

Let us glorify God for His mercy.

Let us praise Him among the nations.

Let us sing the praises of His name.

Let us rejoice with all His people.

Jesus was the one who came to rule over the nations. In Him we have hope.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.