

## Sermon Transcript - 3rd Sunday in Advent - Rev Bart Coleman

December 12, 2021

Grace and peace to you from God, our loving creator, the Christ who was, who is, who is to come. And the spirit who gathers us and gives us to be part of God's life giving ways in the world.

It is said that the really good fire and brimstone sermons, you know, the ones that are really edgy, they're the ones that come out at you and they sort of go up, over your head, and nail the person about 4 rows back. We squirm, when we hear John the Baptist, I mean he calls names, he uses frightening imagery and yet the very end of the gospel reading says that John is exhorting with good news. It turns out the news is good, that God's liberating intentions are not only for the taxed and the extorted and the political one, but for those who attacks and those who extort and those who might hold others down. The good news is ambiguous, isn't it?

Listening to a Podcast this week, I had kind of a different take on a sermon that I would ordinarily preach. You know the one where we get after those tax collectors and we get after those soldiers and we tell

them we'll just knock it off and everything'll be fine. I was invited to think about that a little extra, so if we collect only our fair share in taxes and everybody else around us is padding the bill, doesn't that make other people look bad. Could be a little awkward in the break room when word gets out about that. And for the soldiers, who do the (inaudible) culture that rewards extortion, if soldiers start opting out of that system, what becomes of the system? Perhaps that's the chaff that John speaks of. It's not easy and it's not simple, but this is what John calls people to do. That with God's liberating word and ways of being breaking into the world, John calls us to prepare, to prepare our hearts and we expect things to be up ended, to expect things to change.

I noticed during the prelude today Lily, Lockhart, one of my all time favourite songs which is an interpretation of the magnificat and it's done to the Gaelic tune, the world's about to turn. That's what John speaks of is, this revolutionary way that things will happen, when people begin to give, when they see those who have not. It's tempting to go after the greed and the extortion and I would love to do this, but I don't think it's my place to rail about the greed of the corporations, although I think that. You see, there's work that we creatures need to do and the podcast, that I referenced earlier, Doctor Matt Skinner says you need to do some homework before you preach stuff like that. And the homework comes down to

considering our place in systems, where things aren't fair.

So I might get a little crabby about a certain company that sends people into outer space and whose CEO makes a lot of money in profit and whose profit and whose profits have been record setting during the pandemic. But if I'm honest I need to tell you how much I love that company because they can get stuff to my door before I even know I ordered it. It's so convenient, it's so easy, it's so quick. But there I am. How indignant do I dare get? And if I get really indignant is it really righteous because, guess what, there I am part of the system. That's part of what it means, I suppose to be prepared it is to start thinking about where do I fit in places where there is inequity? Where do I fit in places where people are absorbing more of a burden than is fair? Believe it or not, I even think about this on recycle day. I love that this area is so good about sorting out all of your, like trash and recyclables and compostables. I love that there's care for the environment, but sometimes I think, am I just passing on my problems to somebody else? Maybe that too is part of this preparation that John calls us into. There are ways that maybe we can help others to absorb less of a burden. And maybe we find some freedom in the process. I think that's what John truly gets to when people who come out to be baptized and were seeking good news ask, "how do we prepare for God's loving ways to find their way and to break in to

the world". Some of them are quite concrete. I love the line about if you have two coats and somebody doesn't have one, give one away.

This week alone there were 2 times where I got to see that in action. And the first was visiting one of our sister congregations, Central United, who does the Coats for Kids program. I just happened to be there on a day that people were coming to shop and I got a tour, and got to observe as people came in. And there were several things that struck me. The first was, if you need a coat, you go in and you get one. There are no questions about eligibility, or worthiness or anything. Now it is true that you provide a name and a phone number but that's really for contact tracing during this era of Covid more than it has to do with who's getting coats. They also count because they like to know what's our impact in our neighbourhood. But the other thing that really struck me was that as people came in to shop, the dignity that was shown and there was no sense, that I could pick up, where there was someone from up on high, doing great acts of charity for someone down here. But people here acted, and because I didn't really know people, I didn't know who the givers and who the recipients were. I couldn't tell the difference There was an atmosphere there of kindness of community and dignity all around. I think John the Baptist would approve, I'm positive Jesus would. And maybe you've walked some of the streets here in town this week and you've seen coats hanging

on phone poles. Have you noticed that? And there are those little tags that say, "I am not lost, but if you need a coat take me". I wanted to look at the back of the tags and so, nosey as I am, I did. I thought well, I'd love to know who's doing this because I'd like to do a shoutout, I'd like to connect with them and at least offer a word of thanks. There wasn't one. I think John Baptist might like that too. I know it's a "Jesusy" thing to do for sure, to give without expectation of anything to you knowing that there are people in need, that too another way of preparing for God's love breaking into the world.

And when it comes to preparedness, we watch, we expect and sometimes we even get to participate. And so when John speaks of God as a Liberator we are part of that liberating. Maybe lessening someone else's burden, making their lives a bit brighter . We often speak about what happens as we are baptized and brought into communities of faith, that we are brought into God's love and mercy, but we are also joined to God's mission for the life of the world. And so John the Baptist's fiery sermon, and you're fine to leave out the name calling and all the other stuff if you like, but take this along if you would. The invitation to God's freedom and our place is God's people of faith to carry that on and to be that so, as we proclaim the good news of God's love in the world, we can be that good news of God's love in the world.

What then shall we do? I'll quote a prophet from some eight hundred years before John and before Jesus, the prophet Micah, "What is then that God requires of us, but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk mindfully in the presence of God". May that be so within us, and may that be so among us. Amen