

Third Weekend of Advent (RCL/C)  
Zephaniah 3:14-20; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18  
December 11-12, 2021  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Here's *The Message* paraphrase of today's Gospel. As you'll see, John the Baptist comes out swinging and obviously is **not** running for office or seeking to become Mr.

Popularity:

*7-9 When crowds of people came out for baptism because it was the popular thing to do, John exploded: "Brood of snakes! What do you think you're doing slithering down here to the river? Do you think a little water on your snakeskins is going to deflect God's judgment? It's your life that must change, not your skin. And don't think you can pull rank by claiming Abraham as 'father.' Being a child of Abraham is neither here nor there—children of Abraham are a dime a dozen. God can make children from stones if he wants. What counts is your life. Is it green and flourishing? Because if it's deadwood, it goes on the fire." [Another way of saying this: "Don't talk to me about your roots; show me your fruits!"]*

*10 The crowd asked him, "Then what are we supposed to do?"<sup>11</sup> "If you have two coats, give one away," he said. [An early church father, Clement of Alexandria, may have been piggybacking on this when he taught, "If you have a coat hanging in the closet, it belongs to the poor." "Radical generosity" is the name of that line of thinking and doing! If I have what you need, it's not mine anymore. ] "Do the same with your food."*

*12 Tax men also came to be baptized and said, "Teacher, what should we do?" [They probably already had a pretty good idea of where they were falling short. Do you know?]*

*13 He told them, "No more extortion—collect only what is required by law."*

*14 Soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" [Were they really so clueless about what they needed to do to "improve"?)*

*He told them, "No harassment, no blackmail—and be content with your rations."*

*15 The interest of the people by now was building. They were all beginning to wonder, "Could this John be the Messiah?" [Not sure why they would ask that, since they fully expected the Messiah to be a military leader ....]*

*16-17 But John intervened: "I'm baptizing you here in the river. The main character in this drama, to whom I'm a mere stagehand, will ignite the kingdom life, a fire, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. He's going to clean house—make a*

*clean sweep of your lives. He'll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he'll put out with the trash to be burned."*

*18-20 There was a lot more of this—words that gave strength to the people, words that put heart in them. The Message! But Herod, the ruler, stung by John's rebuke in the matter of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, capped his long string of evil deeds with this outrage: He put John in jail.*

And John never came out again. His public witness was over. He had done his job: serving as opener for Jesus' main act. He had urged the people to repent. Jesus would, too. But whereas John **spoke** about the people's need for forgiveness, Jesus was the **instrument** and **channel** for God's forgiveness. Both John and Jesus encouraged the people to live a kingdom-life, to weave love of God and love of neighbor into their 7 days a week/24 hours a day existence. They both preached about and pushed people toward what the intro to our Gospel calls "radical generosity, and vocational integrity."<sup>1</sup>

On the theme of radical generosity, Pastor Hank sent me the lyrics to a lovely hymn called "If I Have Two Coats."<sup>2</sup> It reminds us that we Christians are called to radical generosity as surely today as John's and Jesus' hearers were two thousand years ago:

If I have two coats, God calls me to share;  
There's someone nearby with no coat to wear.  
And if I don't know who that person might be,  
It's to a new friendship that God's calling me.

If I have some bread — and soup, all the more —  
I'm called to reach out to someone who's poor.  
And if I don't know who that person might be,  
It's to a new table that God's calling me.

If money is mine, God calls me to live  
As someone who loves to generously give;  
And if I don't know someone suffering near me,  
It's to a new neighbor that God's calling me.

O God of great truth, John's call to obey  
Prepared us for Christ, who shows us your Way.

May we have the courage to try something new,  
To reach to new neighbors and so welcome you.

Biblical Reference: Luke 3:7-18

"Mine! All mine!" is not an attitude our Lord wants to hear from us. The only One who could possibly say, "Mine! All mine!" is God, and God has chosen to share what is rightly God's with us. Our proper response is: a) to say a heartfelt "Thank you!"; b) to acknowledge that we have nothing we didn't first receive; c) to recognize that many gifts come **to** us in order to pass **through** us to others. We are honored and privileged to be channels through which God's blessings flow to others among God's children.

In this weekend's lesson from Zephaniah the Lord says:

*I will save the lame  
and gather the outcast,  
and I will change their shame into praise...  
At that time I will bring you home.... (Zephaniah 3:19b-c, 20a)*

We are never the **Source** of healing for the lame or welcome for the outcast or honor for the shamed and ashamed, but we **can** be willing instruments in God's hands and enthusiastic participants in the coming of the Kingdom of God. God so honors us, that we receive the privilege of "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done," and also the privilege of contributing to that divine state of affairs. Amen

<sup>1</sup>*Celebrate, Sundays and Seasons, Cycle C, Augsburg Fortress, 2021.*

<sup>2</sup>Text copyright 2015 by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. Can be sung to "O Worship the King, All Glorious Above" or to tune of HANOVER.)

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