

Luke 3:7-18

December 12, 2021

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Have you ever been to a concert or sporting event in which the arena, stadium, hall, club or whatever the venue and there is not much light? Perhaps, a few lights shining on the band but the seats in which the audience is located is entirely dark. Then you see the flashlight of one cell phone slowly cut through the darkness. Then another and another and another. Within a matter of seconds, you find yourself in a sea of light bearing forth a most beautiful, glorious glow as those phone radiate beams of brightness.

Advent is a season in which the light grows. The gospel of John reminds us, "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." (John 1:9 NRSV). Of course, that true light has come and is here, but as we light one more candle on the Advent wreath each Sunday God is at work preparing us for the celebration of the birth of the one the Baptist states, "is more powerful" than he is. The one able to "baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Luke 3:16). Through this wreath and the candles adorning it, God is at working bringing just a bit more light into our lives and into the world bearing forth the fruit from the goodness of God's heart. Fruit of love, mercy, redemption, and forgiveness.

Hindsight is always 20/20 they say and in hindsight, I wish I had chosen "This Little Light of Mine" to be the hymn that follows this message because within each of us burns that glorious glow of the true light who has come into the world. Within each of us is the fruit that emanates from the one who sent that light into the world that first Christmas.

The prophet Isaiah reminded Israel God called them to be "a light unto the nations" so that God's "salvation may reach to the end of the earth." (Isaiah 49:6 NRSV) That was part and parcel to their calling, their mission as God's covenant people. In a like manner, Jesus in Matthew 5 states, "You are the light of the world." Therefore, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16 NRSV)

These are the words God speaks to us in our baptisms into the body of Christ. They are part of our baptismal vocation. Part and parcel to our calling and mission as people of God, disciples of the true Light.

Several chapters beyond today's gospel lesson, Jesus states:

³³ "No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar, but on the lampstand so that those who enter may see the light. ³⁴ Your eye is the lamp of your body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light; but if it is not healthy, your body is full of darkness. ³⁵ Therefore consider whether the light in you is not darkness. ³⁶ If then your whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness, it will be as full of light as when a lamp gives you light with its rays." (Luke 11:33-36 NRSV)

Reflecting on these later words of Jesus drew me back to John the Baptists words to those in the wilderness and subsequently the church throughout the ages as we hear the words of life that continue to speak to us daily. John speaks of repentance as a way of life. We are to bear fruits worthy of repentance.

That fruit is within us because the great giver has put it there and continues to give daily. Yet, at times those fruits may become hidden. Our lights may not shine as brightly for the world to see. We may need to stop and ponder if the light within us is not darkness? Have we lost our way?

If so, "What then should we do?" In a season in which we talk a lot of preparation we must stop and remember it is God who prepares first. All this talk of repentance surely is of significant importance in the life of God's people. God is doing something through it and repentance is part of that preparation. I wonder if at times we view repentance as a chore or we merely repeat the words on the pages of paper in our hands and fail to view them for the gift they are.

In a season of gift-giving and our attempts to secure that perfect gift for a loved one or friend we have a most treasured gift right before us. Yes, that most treasured of all is that babe born in a stable and placed in a manger. Yet, what the people in the wilderness may not yet been able to see and comprehend and what

we may from time to time lose sight of us is this gift of repentance in which God continues to prepare in us the ability to bear fruit and shine light for all to see.

If some part of us is spiritual unhealthy and the lamp of our body has slowly dimmed repentance is part of the cure. Repentance restores in us the fuel of grace and forgiveness. Repentance is God's way of driving out the darkness and restoring in us the light. Jesus cleanses the Temple at the end of Luke's gospel and repentance may be one of the ways in which God is working cleaning the temple of our bodies.

"Unless you repent you will perish" (Luke 13:3) Jesus says in the thirteenth chapter. As I think about those words, the spiritual tool of confession, it stirs something within me. Repentance forces us to admit we cannot go it alone. We need help. It sets our sight solely on the one greater than we are to shine upon and within us his abundant light of forgiveness and healing. When we hear those words, "your sins are forgiven" it is as if a huge weight has been lifted. Our sights are again set squarely on God, and we are yet again created anew and sent forth with clean hearts prepared to bear fruit and shine light.

There have been many things we all have learned over what now is nearly two years since the onset of this pandemic that still rages. As the gift of technology has been a most wonderful tool through which the church has continued to proclaim the good news and the light of Christ has shown through it for the world to see at times that same technology succumbs to glitches and the intended fruit, we hope it bears momentarily goes dim. What should we do is a question I have asked many times and perhaps you have too? I have called technical support lines for an answer, a healing of sorts to the problem at hand, and the first question almost always is, "Have you rebooted ... your laptop or your router or your phone or whatever electronic device it may be." Sure enough, on many an occasion, that reset works and restores things yet again to work at they were intended.

Repentance just might be our reset button God has provided. A most treasured gift to behold as God continues to prepare us to be light and bear fruit. Remember dear people of God, "You are the light of the world."