

**"The Fruits Worthy of Repentance -
Living under the Gospel"
Luke 3:7-18**

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho

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Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Lord God - in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

Last Sunday we heard the voice of the prophet crying in the wilderness to prepare the Way of the Lord. This proclamation came from the mouth of John the Baptizer and noted that, while we are not able to prepare the Way, the Lord is and the Lord does. Through His Law that always accuses our old sinful nature, God shows us our sin. When deep sorrow settles upon our souls then we are ready to hear the Good News of Jesus Who took our place under the curse and condemnation of the Law. God died on the cross to prepare and to be the Way to Paradise for us.

Today's Gospel Reading is the practical application of John's message of the Messiah to the individual - to you, to me, to every one - and as such, the message raises a number of questions, ones that boil down to: What are we to do? The announcement of John the Baptist raised caused that question to surface in the minds and in the mouths of the people who came out to hear the Word. Please listen to the first portion of that text now and the remaining portion in the sermon ...

... "The Fruits worthy of Repentance - Living under the Gospel"

The he (John) said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do?"

Thus far the Word of the Lord our God.

When the multitudes came out to be baptized by John they were confronted with an introduction that must have put everyone on their heels, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Everyone fell under the indictment of the Law since everyone's sinful nature destines them for destruction under the wrath of God. Then the preacher tells them what they are to do and what they are not to do - "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to

yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.'" The fruits worthy of repentance do not include an appeal for favor with God based upon one's genealogy or one's ethnicity. Such an attempt to seek salvation based upon the family tree meets with the condemnation of the Lord God Almighty. Or, as John declares, "even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." Is it any wonder that people might either tremble with fear or speak in a challenging manner, saying, "What shall we do?" Ah yes, the answer to that question, "What shall we do?"

In a time when Christ's pulpit is all too often used for motivational exercises for the Christian to live out his or her life under the Law, the temptation to preach today's text in that legalistic way and for legalistic means is overwhelming. The sermon becomes a checklist of do's and don't's. This is particularly the situation when the pastor has no idea just what the Gospel is. As you little children know, the Gospel is the Good News that Jesus paid the price for all sins; and as you faithful children continue to learn, repentance is being sorry for your sins and looking to Christ as the Savior.

So the first fruit worthy of repentance comes from the Word of God and the office of John who "went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:3). The worthiest fruit of repentance is to be prepared for the coming of the Messiah and that begins by being baptized for the forgiveness of sins. There are surely three reactions to this worthiest fruit of repentance that become troublesome and result in a condition of serious peril to the individual.

The first is the most obvious; namely the rejection of this need. When the Pharisees and the other self-righteous people there who felt that they have not need for either repentance or remission of sins, they rejected John's baptism. "The Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves when they refused to be baptized by John" (Luke 7:30). Thus they rejected God's purpose for them and remained outside the Kingdom of God's Grace. In short, and until such persons are repentant, they were lost.

The second is the attempt to turn Gospel into Law by making Baptism the work of the individual rather than the Gift of God. It is like a man who is given the Crown of Life and instead desires to make both the Gift and the reception of it his work. "Do you not see this Crown of Life that I have fashioned for myself and which I deserve. I place this deserved Crown upon my head and have made it my own. I have done such a fine job and I am certain that God loves me for it and that I have earned a royal throne in heaven as a result of my good work." You know the results of such a pompous attitude and pride-filled heart.

The third way of thinking about Baptism is one that we, as Christians, are more likely to fall prey to. Indeed, as Lutherans, are sorely tempted to view the Christian life as a checklist and to begin checking things off as being accomplished - especially when you hear that the worthiest fruit of repentance is to be baptized for the remission of sins. The old sinful nature hears that and says, "Very good. That was easy. Got that one done. Cross Baptism off my checklist. I was baptized as an infant. This is easy. Okay, what's next on my list of things to do, to get done and to be done with?" This views Baptism as history - as past tense, "I was baptized."

The truth is that, no matter how long ago you "were baptized into His (Christ's) Death" (Romans 6:3), you are baptized and that is present tense. I am baptized and I live in this Word of God and am continually under His grace and constantly have the remission of my sins. Thus, "it is no longer I

who live, but Christ lives in me; and the Life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died in vain" (Galatians 2:20-21).

You ask, "What, then, are more fruits worthy of repentance?" Well, take the positive fruits of the first three commandments - #1: trust the LORD your God - #2: call upon the LORD your God - #3: enter into the Presence of the LORD your God. You can see where these also are not items to be checked off of a list of things to do and to be done with them. Each of these fruits that are worthy of repentance is an abiding that continues to take place in the present by the penitent. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

The Pharisee has stopped listening long ago while the people hear the voice of the prophet and ask, "What shall we do?" John now answers the question with respect to a Christian's neighbor. How is a Lutheran called to love and serve other people? What are the fruits worthy of repentance with respect to one's neighbor? John "answered, 'He who has two tunics. Let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.'" This is the general encouragement to engage in acts of mercy by giving away the excess and sharing these with others. These are good works that flow from faith and are fruits worthy of repentance. Still, we must not think that these are good works that we are doing in the lives we now have in Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father.

This is the difference between the Pharisee and the Christian. The Pharisee is idle, empty, devoid of Christ's work; and the work of Christ is not in him. And what of you, the Christian? "It is not the Christian who lives, speaks, works, and suffers; it is Christ Who does all this in him. All his (the Christian's) works are works of Christ, so inestimable is the grace of faith. Therefore he who is removed to the Law now lives in himself; he busies himself with his own work, his own life, his own word; that is, he sins and does not fulfill the Law. He has no interest in Christ; Christ does not dwell in him or make use of him. ... He who believes in Christ empties himself and becomes disengaged from his own works, in order that Christ may live and work in him" (Luther's Works, ae, v. 27, page 332).

Ah yes, what about work? You see, there are more questions and they have to do with one's vocation. "Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Collect no more than what is appointed for you.' Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, 'And what shall we do?' So he said to them, 'Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.'"

Those types of questions have been asked by the faithful for years and were asked often enough such that a number of Scripture verses that address the inquiries were assembled and included in Luther's Small Catechism. The Table of Duties has been printed out and included as an insert in your bulletins for this morning. Bearing fruits worthy of repentance is Christ doing these good works in and through you in the various vocations in which you find yourself. As you notice, one of the duties of bishops, pastors and preachers is to hold fast the faithful Word ... and be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

This is part of the Call that your pastor has and it is what Christ seeks to do through him here at this place and in this time. This was also part of John the Baptizer's Call and what Christ did through him in that place and at that time."Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts

about John, whether he was the Christ or not, John answered, saying to them all, 'I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, Whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.'

The message of Christian preaching and teaching - of Lutheran proclamation and catechesis - is the same as what our Lord said through John. The Gospel is the same, salvation is by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Who paid for all sins when He died on the cross and Who demonstrated victory over death and the devil when He rose again from the dead. God's people live under this Good News and the fruits worthy of repentance is simply living one's life under this Gospel.

Just as today, so also in the days when Zachariah's son was "preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:3) "and with many other exhortations he preached to the people" (Luke 3:18). In a reflection of the person and work of Jesus, the exhortations of John were well-received by some and hated by others. John continued and he was imprisoned for His unwavering, uncompromising proclamation of the Word. Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel'" (Mark 1:14). Amen.