

# **Sermon Text for January 10, 2016**

*By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema*

Isaiah 12:2-6 Luke 3:7-14, 18  
“What then shall we do?”

This is our last week in Luke before we get back to our Genesis series. We are still making our way through Genesis after nearly 2 years. I know, you probably forgot where we left off. But for Advent and the Christmas season and now today for the baptism of our Lord we find ourselves in Luke. We've seen all of the people involved in the Christmas story from Mary to Joseph to the Shepherds. Now it is time for Jesus to begin his ministry and we find ourselves with his strange cousin John.

On Friday I filled in for the coach of the Middle School girls basketball team. He's one of the pastors at Lancaster Alliance Church and his daughter plays with my girls at LMH. It was so much fun to be able to get back into it. There was one play where it was perfectly planned where the guard drove on a screen, the screener rolled to the basket, got the ball and scored. It was perfect. It was different from one of the first teams of my daughters that I coached. There was one boy that I was helping to get him to dribble the ball to the basket, dribble around the defense and then make a layup. Well, the next game he had his opportunity, it was perfect. He got the ball, dribbled around the person who was covering him, got to the basket, but then he stopped, looked at me helplessly and said: now what? Shoot. I had forgotten to tell him the most important thing which was to shoot and put the ball in the basket.

Today we get the answer to the question of once we repent, accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, now what? Hear me well. If you haven't repented, if you haven't given your life to Christ, well then back up and know that is the first step. But today we are going to see the now what? Once we've done all that, now what? How does true repentance manifest itself in our daily lives? John calls us to bear fruit worthy of repentance. This sign of our repentance, that we are ready for Christ, that we have begun to understand God's kingdom is that we are able to reach out to the poor, the powerless, the marginalized. If we are able to do this as individuals and as a body of Christ then it is a sign that we are bearing fruit out of our state of preparedness.

We get introduced to John the Baptist here and we find him preaching to the crowds who had come out to see him. He begins his sermon to the people by calling

them a brood of vipers. Now personally, I've never tried that but it seemed to work for him and he gets their attention.

He then commands them to bear fruit worthy of repentance. He had just finished telling the people that they needed to repent and now he is going to tell them how. He doesn't approach them and tell them that they all have to change their lives so that they have to become like him. He is not telling them that they have to sell all of their possessions, put on a camel's hair and clothes and leather belt and eat locusts and wild honey. He isn't telling them to leave their families and to go out into the desert and worship God.

So often when we get to John the Baptist and his message of repentance it is portrayed that he is screaming and yelling at people telling them that they have to become like him. No, today, John's message of repentance is not one of sacrificial offerings for sins, or sackcloth and ashes, or running off to the desert, but rather a message of reformation geared toward social responsibility. He also has a different message for each different group of people that approach him and ask him point blank: what are we supposed to do, now what?

I pray that when I preach people are never thinking I need to become more like Bob, but rather I need to become more like Christ. John does not use himself as an example of repentance but rather the image of Christ whose purpose was to bring people to the Father's throne as John states elsewhere: "I must decrease and he must increase." What a great motto for all of us. Our examples and our goals in how we live our lives should only reflect the example our Savior sets and no one else.

Once John commands the crowds to bear fruits worthy of repentance the people ask: what then should we do? We are in a time in the life of the church where people are asking what shall we do? When you go through the new members class and fill out the opportunities for service you expect the church to follow through and contact you. Again the crowd asks John what shall we do, how can we get connected, how can we help. And John gives them practical chores and assignments to complete.

When we go through officer training like we did this past weekend and I saw so many new faces who will be officers I can hear them asking: what am I supposed to do? What's next for me in this thing that we call church? This congregation is filled with people who want to help out and get involved but either have never been asked to

actually do something, or have called themselves and been told that there wasn't any need.

There is nothing worse than getting people convinced that something is good and right and getting them fired up about something and then leaving them with nothing. When people ask, when you ask what should we do you expect a task, a job. Let me give you some homework, if you aren't currently involved in some way in the church, get involved. I was so pleased when each officer was able to say a tangible way in which they were involved. Bear fruit, real tangible fruit.

What then shall we do, how do we get connected? John gives 3 very practical ways to show their repentance. It goes along with James 2 where the author states: What good is it, my brothers and sisters if you say you have faith but do not have works. Can faith save you? If a brother or a sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them go in peace, keep warm and eat your fill and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith, by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Our faith is useless, dead if we do not bear fruit worthy of repentance if we do not get out with the people who are in need, especially this time of year. They ask this three times in this Scripture and each time John responds with a very tangible, concrete answer. But notice each person is different who asks and to each person John gives a different answer. When the crowd asks John what shall we do he responds: If you have two tunics share one with someone who has none. If you have food, there is always those who have none, share it with someone who has none. These are fruits of repentance, by our acts of love and compassion they will know that we are Christians.

A tax collector asks: what shall I do? Back then they were pretty free in being able to collect what they wanted, today they can just follow the law. Do not take advantage of your power for your own gain against the powerless. This is true today, again this is a message of reform, he doesn't tell the tax collector to give his job up and go to the desert to study Scriptures, be fair, is all that he says. The soldiers ask, what then shall we do? The soldiers then were the Jewish guard of the high priest who were able to extort at whim. Be satisfied with your wages because dissatisfaction at your job causes anger, resentment, and even dishonest practice if we feel like we need something more to make ends meet.

What a message to a people in the midst of a crisis. Be satisfied with your wages. A sign of repentance, a sign that you are ready for the coming of Christ is that you are

satisfied with your wages at your job. Or be satisfied with your job, or make your job satisfying.

Do you see how John's message speaks directly to all of us. We need to be content, happy with who we are and what we have here and now. This stability and confidence that comes from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ ought to motivate us to bear fruits of repentance that are socially impactful. As Isaiah states if we are satisfied here and now then and only then we can state: Surely God is my salvation, I will trust and will not be afraid, for the Lord is my strength and my might, he has become my salvation.

Repentance is bearing fruit that allows the kingdom of God to strike for an instant on this earth through us. We can't say that we are Christians and look with contempt and disdain upon the poor. We can't say that we are Christians and yet consider those different than we are as less than we are. We can't say that we are Christians and yet reserve our love for those who are similar to us. We can't say that we are Christians unless we bear fruit worthy of repentance that have a social impact on the society around us.

May God bless us and keep us as we look to bear fruit worth of repentance.  
Amen.