

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Advent

December 12, 2026 Devotion

John calls a group gathered to observe him a brood of vipers. Paul tells the Philippians to not worry about anything, but with gentleness to show others the Gospel through their lives. At first, we may find the contrast seemingly contradictory, but as is true in real life, the contrast of humanity, our personalities and the reality of sinfulness are things we are reminded of each day.

Paul could have been one of those pharisees gathered next to the river Jordan checking the Baptizer out. The contrast of the lessons is one that speaks to the rebellion into which we were born. On the one hand, we are very opinionated, become set in what we think is right, and judgmental of those who are different. Paul was such a man. But see the power of the Gospel and how one who was once hostile trusts God in all circumstances and for all things. This is the very thing that the promise of the Lord does. It takes us, we who are hostile to the truth of the Lord, and makes of us people who are not contentious, making us instead willing servants of the Lord and of one another. The Gospel truly is miraculous.

We tend to associate ourselves with what we believe is the winning side. “Who warned you to flee?” We flee from that which we believe is wrong. Our Lord invites into that which is right. The style of John the Baptist is confrontational, which is what we sometimes need. It breaks through the idea that to be gentle is to not say anything that might be in any way offensive. Oh, how we understand this in this age of hyper-sensitivity where we are to be so guarded, parsing our words carefully so that we offend no one. But hear the truth of what John says.

Rather than going to the place where we think, “I am glad I am not one of the brood of vipers,” go to the place where sin has caused us to think in terms that are hostile to the Gospel. This is the heart of the message of John. The Holy Spirit continues to work in us, for we know that we shall be conformed to the image of Christ. This is why we are told to bear fruit befitting repentance.

We live in an age where we have come to anticipate quick fixes, a dose of the right medicine to make things right, and once-for-all resolution. But how often are our electronics and devices updated? This is a reminder that one more quirk, issue, or problem needs to be resolved. How much more so with humans who are infinitely more complex. It seems we need constant updates. In fact, this is kind of what we do each Sunday with confession and absolution. It’s a time for an update from our Maker. You have the promise of Christ in you. Salvation is assured. It is not what you do that makes you approved, but the One who has done all that is needed who gives us our assurance in faith. He who has begun a good work in you will carry it on to completion.

Sometimes it seems as though we get caught up in thinking that all is well when we would be better served to think in terms of what is needed next. Yes, the Lord will perfect us, but like all of life, that comes one step at a time.

Those who were listening to John asked, “Rabbi, what should we do?” This is perhaps the best place to begin with the Lord. The Pharisees asked, “What do you think you are doing?” The faithful ask, “What shall we do?” The attitude of the heart is important. There are those who are expectant, awaiting others to bow to their will and then there are those who seek to do what the Lord would have them do. Do we not see that in our own culture? Is this not some of the prevailing attitudes of those around us? We are called by our Lord to continuously learn the lessons that will prepare us for the life to come knowing they are useful here and now.

When we understand the need to bear fruit befitting repentance, we come to the place of anticipating what the Lord will do next in our lives. This is the basis of teaching the ten commandments as a core of confirmation. We are forgiven our sins, so we do not see the law in terms of condemnation. That portion has already been completed in the hope we have through our baptism. Instead, we see the ten commandments in terms of being perfected, that is, being made ready to stand before Jesus after the final day.

Jesus said that if we abide in Him and He in us, we would bear fruit. He also said that the Father is the vine dresser and that He would prune us that we might bear more fruit. Any who have raised fruit trees know the importance of this. Good trees bear good fruit and bad trees do not bear fruit. Bear fruit befitting repentance. It is a part of living the Gospel life.

Our inclination is to think in terms of "Mine." We are called to share. When we share with one in need, that is justice. When we share with one who takes, but does not need, that is grace. But, we are called to share. This is why we have opportunities throughout the year to share our bounty with others in need. Whether it is a cap on the mitten tree, a gift to some ministry as benevolence, or the work that we do for others through this ministry that we call our church, these are a part of the learning lessons our Lord teaches us. What is behind this? In part, the simple principle that we have been created to serve and serving ourselves is not the answer. To the tax collectors we are taught to do what is right. Translating that to our day, are we fulfilling our portion of things? Where I have seen this play out in church life is in the simple reality that there are those whose offerings are their opinions and little else. The diligent, hard working are also often the most generous not only of their time, but also of their abilities and the gifts they give for the Lord's work. Jesus told us that we will be known by the fruit we bear.

A part of the lesson comes with the truth that there are those who extort from others. They take, but do not give. We are reminded to be satisfied with our situation. How many times are their threats? "If you don't do this . . . I will." We should not give ground for such things.

You see, we are called to be in fellowship with one another. We are human and so we do not all agree upon all things, but neither are we to put up with contention. As far as we are concerned, we are to humbly love the Lord, one another, and seek for His will to be done in our midst. The world is anxious, but we know that all things are in the Father's hands. Therefore, we need not be anxious for anything. We are to be a people of prayer, being in constant communication with our Lord and Savior knowing that by the power of the Holy Spirit all that needs to be done shall be done. The Lord will deal with those who seek to lead us astray. We should then be focused and be about the business the Holy Spirit guides us to do.

Each of us, like John the Baptist have assignments from the Lord. When we walk in wisdom, we seek to do what is pleasing to our Lord. In faith, there are no small or large tasks, only obedient and disobedient actions. You see, John introduces us to the journey through repentance, but Jesus has come and will come again to sift through the hearts and minds of all. We say that we believe that Jesus is coming to judge the living and the dead. That is, he will sift the faithful out from amongst the unfaithful. The real question for each one of us each day is the question of whether or not we have been faithful to the call of our Lord and Savior. Yes, we are saved, but will we live in that salvation or act as those who have no hope?

The good news is that our Savior Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to guide us each step of the way. In the wisdom the Lord gives, let us work together for His sake knowing that He is completing all that He has promised. Without fear, we can proclaim together, "Yes, Lord, come quickly." Meanwhile, let us be about the Lord's business always! Amen.