

**The Second Sunday of Advent: Holy Trinity Church: December 5, 2021**

**Luke 3: 1-6: Repent, Share, Serve,**

**Preached**

**By**

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**In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**My parents socialized with a couple living next to us. When I look back at this time and remember them, they were very nice, but there was a sadness about them. They could not have children. All the Irish and Italian families living in the neighborhood had children, lots of children. It was in the 1950s and we were all Roman Catholics. Finally, I had to ask the question; Mom and Dad, how come Wally and Betty have no kids? Mom took this question and she answered me. Betty and Wally have been trying. They have been waiting to have a baby for a long time. Mom said, they are going to adopt a baby. They have been interviewed carefully and scrutinized. The adoption agency people went through their financials and their beautiful home. They passed with flying colors. At last, their dreams were to be fulfilled. But their day of happiness was another's pain.**

Arriving at the Adoption Society they were led up a flight of stairs to a waiting room. After a few minutes they heard someone else climbing up the stairs. It was a young student mother whose baby was to be adopted. She was met by the Adoption Agent responsible for the arrangements and taken into another room. Wally and Betty heard a muffled conversation and a few minutes later footsteps on the stairs as the young mother left. They heard her convulsive sobbing until the front door of the office was closed. Then, there was silence.

The lady in charge then conducted them through the next door. In a little crib was a baby boy, six-weeks-old. On a chair beside there was a brown paper bag containing a change of clothes and two letters. One of these, addressed to the new parents thanking them for providing a home for her baby and acknowledged that under the terms of the adoption each would never know the other's identity. Then the young mother added one request. Would they allow her little son to read the other letter on his eighteenth birthday? She assured them that she had not included any information about her identity. The couple entrusted that letter to a lawyer and one day when the young man will read the message which his mother wrote on the day when with breaking heart, she parted with him.

**My sisters and brothers, I wonder what she wrote? If I had to condense all I feel about life and love into a few precious words what would you say? I would have no time for trivia. I would not be concerned about history, economics, politics, the weather, the size of house or the type of car. At such a time I would want to dwell on the profundities, on what life was all about and what things were absolutely essential.**

**You see, on this second Sunday of Advent, John the Baptist comes across oceans of time in the desert in the great tradition of the Hebrew prophets. John knows he was aware that time his time was running out. In his burning message he had no time for peripheral matters. Soon the sword of Herod's guard would flash, and John's voice would lie silent in the grave. Superficial people came out from Jerusalem to see him. They were intrigued by this strange phenomenon of a wild man preaching repentance. They were fascinated by frivolous things such as his dress, his diet and his fierce oratory. They wanted to interview him and then tell all their friends about their remarkable experience. "Who are you?" they asked. His answer was curt: "I am not the Christ." "Are you Isaiah?" "No!" "Then who are you?" they persisted. They had their doubts about who he was but his message to their ears was clear: Repent.**

**There are times when I preach, there comes at that sweet moment when the church is completely silent. I feel your silence you can hear a pin drop, when you get the message. You are concentrating the message. For me, at that very moment, I know you are listening to what I am saying. I say to you today, REPENT! I would like to suggest this morning ( evening) that REPENT was the first component of John's message.**

**There are two others. Let's look at the first. John's message called people to repentance. One of the towering marks of this age is the absence of guilt. Not many people would deny that fact. Some are pleased that guilt has been dethroned; others see it as a bad sign. The absence of guilt today makes it very difficult to talk about repentance. So, if there is no feeling of guilt, then the need for repentance is greatly minimized, if not altogether eliminated.**

**For many the word repentance is a word that belongs to yesterday. It is equated with sackcloth and ashes. Some see repentance as something that we do only if we get caught. But, repentance is far more than simply blurting out, "Me bad," or "Sorry." If, and that's a big IF, we get caught cheating on the IRS or on your spouse. Nor is repentance merely turning over a new leaf. I will have to admit that one of my favorite times of the week is Sunday afternoon. The pressure of the day has been lifted and it is like starting all**

over again. It's like putting a clean page in a Word document. It's a great feeling. But repentance is far more than just starting over again. Repentance is also far more than simply when we are confessing our sins with everyone. Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor...Most merciful God. We are praying our sins known and unknown in our corporate confession together that we pray each week.

In John Steinbeck's story "The Wayward Bus" a dilapidated old bus takes a cross country shortcut on its journey to Los Angeles and gets stuck in the mud. While the drivers go for assistance, the passengers take refuge in a cave. It is a curious company of people and it is obvious that the author is attempting to get across the point that these people are lost spiritually as well as literally. As they enter this cave, the author calls the reader's attention to the fact that as they enter they must pass a word that has been scrawled with paint over the entrance. The word is repent. Although Steinbeck calls that to the reader's attention it is interesting that none of the passengers pay any attention to it whatsoever.

All too often this is our story. Yet, John the Baptist calls upon us to take our sinning seriously. Why? Because God does? Repentance is not just changing our minds or feeling sorry or my bad for something that we have done, or

even making bold resolves that we will never participate in certain conduct again. Instead, repentance means to turn around and go in another direction. It is **What John the Baptist wanted his audience to hear was: Turn your life toward this one called Messiah. This is not negative or down-faced. Rather, it breaks the chains of oppression and death that hold us back.**

**In another church I served, at the end of the Mass, one of my parishioners told me after a sermon during Advent: You know Father John the problem with John the Baptist is that he takes all the fun out of our Christmas, REALL! He couldn't have been further from the truth.**

**My sisters and brothers in Christ, I submit to you that it is this weird eccentric called John the Baptist who puts the joy back into Christmas. For John is the one who calls us not to Christmas the way it is, but to Christmas the way it is meant to be.**

**First, John admonished his listeners to repent. Second, John told them to share. In Luke 3:10 we read where a crowd approached John and asked of him: "What shall we do then?" In other words, what is expected of us. To this John responded: He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; he who has food, let him do likewise." Sharing is so basically fundamental to**

**our faith that anyone who somehow has not grasp this principle will miss a major thrust of this Advent Season.**

**One of my favorite Christmas stories is O. Henry's short story The Gift of The Magi. You are all familiar with it. A story about a desperately poor young couple living in New York around the turn of the century. Neither had money enough to buy a gift for the other so they each secretly went out and sold something of worth. He sold his prized pocket watch to get her a braid for her long hair. When he presented it to her she removed her scarf to reveal that she had her hair clipped and sold to purchase a chain for his pocket watch. The thrust of the story is obvious. It is not what you give that is important, but the sharing spirit of love in which it is given. That's why we now have the Kindness Tree. This is exactly what we will do as a church. It is all about small acts of kindness that can have a meaningful impact on people's lives. Which kind of acts would you be willing to do. And, if the opportunity arose, would you do them? One of the messages of Advent is that we are called to be a sharing people. Not just at one special season of the year, but to live a life of sharing. Holy Trinity Church is offering such an opportunity during the seasons of Advent and Christmas and beyond. The tree in the sanctuary holds foam ornaments that each have a random act of kindness attached to them. It might be something as simple as holding the door open for someone or**

complimenting a stranger on the street donating old clothes, and taking the time to wash them first. There are unlimited kind acts we can all do every day. Please consider choosing an ornament, it is yours to keep, that has a kind act on it that speaks to you. You don't have to do it today or tomorrow. Maybe you will do it in January or next spring. There is no time limit attached. Or maybe it will become something you do more often. Like taking the newspaper in each morning for your neighbor who may have difficulty doing this. What will your acts of kindness be?

To serve is the final challenge for this 2<sup>nd</sup> week in Advent: Repent, Share, Serve: John's third message was to serve. In other words, whatever your role or task in life, do it ethically to the best of your ability. In whatever role you are in, do what you can where you are. Christian service is not just a missionary in a foreign land. Sometimes it is easier to go to a faraway land than it is to go next door. You may serve God in whatever situation you find yourself, in the home, in the market, in school, by doing the best that you can for God where you are. *"Give, and it will be given to you. A good portion — packed down, firmly shaken, and overflowing — will fall into your lap. The portion you give will determine the portion you receive in return."* Luke 6:38

*Repent, Share Serve. AMEN.*