

December 4, 2022
Second Advent/Communion

Matthew 3:1-12

“Crushing False Hope”

This is our second week in a row having scriptures read for us which are not very, you know, “*Christmassy*.” We are in early December, and we begin to want things to be recognizable and seasonal. For example, (Join in if you like), “*It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas – everywhere you go.*” *There’s a tree at the grand hotel, one in the park as well – the sturdy kind that doesn’t mind the snow. It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas; Soon the bells will start And the thing that will make them ring is the carol that you sing Right within your heart: It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas Toys in every store - But the prettiest sight to see is the holly that will be on your own front door – It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas – Christmas.*”

There are so many things in this season we enjoy. *Today’s text asks us to stretch beyond what we have known **into the deeper reaches of God**.* This is a traditional Advent text. Though we might think it shows up because Ebenezer Scrooge put it there with strong words and images. John stands in the tradition and line of the prophets of old. ***Prophets who weren’t afraid*** to confront whoever was running the show with a corrective word or two from God.

We often focus on the harsh words which come later in the passage...but lots of people were baptized by John without such words. Until the people who were good at doing religious things – things other people could see – show up. People who weren’t at all sure John was actually from God – but wanted in on the show. Jesus would have us know the life of faith is not about putting on a show. ***This life as God’s children brings new life and new directions.*** But it costs us. To more fully we become God’s children, we must surrender ***who we thought we were.***

John comes on strong when the religious leaders ***show up for a baptism they don’t think they need.*** John crushes false hope in *pedigree, self-reliance, and relative human standing.* All things humans count on. The Pharisees and Sadducees need to hear this – and so do we. ***It is so easy to dig in our heels instead of putting our roots deeper and growing.***

Everyone gets a chance in this life to discover *the limits of who we thought we were*. So, let's look to what God is doing to find a new way of being *rather than praying our old selves will rise like a phoenix out of the ashes*.

We learn today that knowing a lot about religion isn't the same as hearing and responding to God's prophetic words. But what happens when those prophetic words come with crushing force? ***Crushing false hope leaves room for the seeds of genuine life and hope to be planted***. Giving up *who we thought we were* is crucial for becoming who God is making us to be.

John wants us *to fulfill the destiny* God began with the Jewish people – the roots of our faith are there. *Jesus comes to fulfill the past and chart the course for God's future*. ***Faith is to know what we see and experience in Jesus is more real and meaningful than the brokenness of the world around us and who we had become comfortable thinking we are***. John says the fire of the spirit will *show us what's real*. We too easily have our heads turned by *superficial things*...which we might call *chaff*. We too easily believe things of *little importance* last forever – like *social standing*. But these things pass away. What is right and real will carry on into God's kingdom. *Fire reveals what's real*.

It seems the breaking of God into the world to change things at Christmas sometimes doesn't feel very Christmassy. But this surprising work of God to renew and shape us - is at the heart of Christmas.

"It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas – God is coming soon. And although we will have to change, hope will grow and rearrange – who we wish we were. It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas – Christmas - Christmas."