

CLOSE TO HOME: A Home For All

December 15, 2024

Michael Swartzentruber, Senior Minister



Luke 3:1-18

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; 6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'" 7 John said to the

crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 9 Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." 10 And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" 11 In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise." 12 Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" 13 He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." 14 Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

15 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 16John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." 18 So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

South Elkhorn Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

4343 Harrodsburg Road, Lexington KY 40513

859-223-1433 southelkhorncc.org

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. Read the passage slowly. Then take a deep breath and read it again. What word, phrase, or image stands out to you?
2. John's message is not abstract, it is practical. Repentance and forgiveness are *seen* in changed lives doing fruitful things. What are the "fruits" John names to the crowd generally, and then to groups within the crowd? How do these fruits make God's people more inclusive, a "home for all"? What might these fruits look like in your life, in the church today, in our wider community?
3. John's words can seem harsh, calling the assembled group "vipers" and speaking of fire-consuming felled trees. One way to understand his words is to see how systems that hurt, harm, and humiliate people need to change—a burning up that leads to something new. Indeed, repentance and forgiveness "burn up" our selfish desires to hoard, steal, exploit, or be content in ignorance. What experience do you have with this kind of personal and collective change? Have you been a part of changing toxic cultures, broken systems, or unjust rules that benefit some and harm others? What did you learn through that experience?
4. John's words are a message of deep joy to those who had been ignored, overlooked, and unjustly

treated. The third Sunday of Advent is all about joy, especially the joy that comes from wrongs being made right. When have you experienced that kind of joy, the one that comes from mended relationships, changed rules, restored belongings, or changed minds?

5. What else brings you joy and feeds your soul?
6. How have you experienced God this Advent season? Is there anything you are learning, discovering, or challenged by?

Find resources for practicing Advent:
southelkhorncc.org/advent

Listen Online

Sermon audio available at southelkhorncc.org/sermons