

Joy at the Inn

December 12, 2021

Luke 3: 10-18

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, ¹⁶ John 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.

Mayfield Kentucky. I've never been there but had massive tornado. A mile wide that traveled two hundred miles on the ground in Kentucky and took out so much of the town is haunting. We see the picture of one house standing next to another house, gone; and the randomness, the abject inequality of it is before us. Its hard to look at it And today we lit the rose candle. It happens every third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday when we are to remember in what was to be an Advent season of penance to claim the joy of Christmas. Of Christ's coming.

But this day also we are asked to listen to John the Baptist a prophet, who surely wanted the people of Jerusalem to get to joy but first to take a good look at themselves and the world they'd accommodated themselves to. The inequities the unkindness, the ways we take advantage of others withhold what others need. Do we not realize that the Messiah who is to come is bringing both the love and the judgment

of God to earth? Luke says: *“And the people cried out: What then should we do?” 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, (tax collectors who routinely demanded more from folks than they were supposed to:) 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 (who threatened people for money) 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.”*

Don't constantly want more help ensure a just sharing. Something like with this vaccine. Don't you know, says John, that if you don't save others you yourselves cannot be saved? But you can do it, that's what the Messiah is coming to say: That, says, John, is the gospel. The Good News. For man months folks here have been working on a plan to reach out to the unhoused. It comes because there is a need CRC can't bring people in yet. The winter's get so cold. But also because we feel something when we see others suffer. We know that somehow our joy is tied up with theirs. We know that we need one another.

Doug announced the pilot of our "Warming Station" on Friday. And you immediately came forward with food and socks and donations. And on Friday, folks that worship online and here came in, set a table, provided soup and bread and a space to listen as one man shared his story of life turned upside-down by a ravaging illness, then loss of work then home. We could see the pain on his face, the fatigue he bore, the gap between his life and ours. His home had been wiped away and ours left standing.

That's what John wanted of the people to see what he saw to see what God sees what the Messiah will see. Janet and Pat came in later that afternoon with a thousand cookies that they made and you bought to raise funds to fund ALS research.

When I arrived for the packing of the food boxes for Bethlehem on Broad Street, the patio was a hive of activity, a warm buzz as the

community of long time members and new folks circled around filling boxes. There was joy, to be doing something together, to meet a need together that we can't meet alone. And folks are making their pledges and finishing paying them for the year. And I know for myself that's not easy, but I also know that there is a sort of joy that comes from doing what we can.

This is the First United Methodist church of Mayfield and this is what it looked like last night. Today, that congregation is worshipping with Christ UMC in Mayfield which has neither heat nor light. And this morning, Pastor Joey Reed has issued this invitation: *“I would love for you to come and worship. Come and grieve. Come and hope. During this season of Advent, our goal is to look forward to the coming of Christ. John tells us that he is the one who was, the one who is, and the one who is to come. And, like John, it is time for us to show the world that we are the church that was, the church that is, and the church that is to come by your presence, your prayers, your gifts, your service, and your witness. You may be feeling overwhelmed. I am too. You may be feeling anxious and nervous for the future. I am too. But with the strength of Jesus Christ, this service of worship can be the place where we pivot from suffering to serving. So, will rally and take care of first things first: the people of Graves County and those whose needs exceed our own.*

I think about Christ Church in Mayfield that has taken them in. I think about that innkeeper who had no rooms left but said, *there is a stable where you can go.* offered what he could And when we do that when we stretch ourselves, offer what God knows and we know we can do what we can. There is a sense of wellbeing. That's a way of saying "salvation" you know. Salve - wellness. We don't share what we have we don't work for a just sharing because it will get us into heaven. We do that because that's way we get to joy here. That's the way to well-being, salve, here and we know it. And John knows it, he called this the GOOD NEWS, the gospel that the new Messiah would bring. Good news of Great Joy. Good news that among the poorest in the land is born one who will comprehend all of us.

Who will invite all of us to trust our lives to the spirit of a loving God. who will lead us to joy, a joy that we sense in Pastor Joey's letter to his

congregation? A joy that goes deeper than what is happening around them. That emerges from the confusion and brokenness of human life when we claim what God has given us the goodness we can do together the mercy and love that shines through. The joy at the inn of the holy, where we are all invited to sing Halleluia.