

Sunday, December 12, 2021  
The Third Sunday in Advent  
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### What then shall we do?

When I first became a pastor, my dad gave me a book, it's titled Sundays and Seasons. It's a book that has in it all the scripture readings for every Sunday of the church year along with ideas for what you could do for a sermon or introit's and prayers and all of that kind of stuff. When I opened it up on Monday morning to begin working on this sermon and I saw that the gospel for this Sunday, the third Sunday of Advent, is Luke 3:7 to 18, I immediately got my phone out and called pastor Huber and said, 'hey buddy thanks for using the gospel for the third week in the second week of Advent.' And he says, 'I did not.' I said, 'you did too! It's right here and the New Testament lesson is Philippians 4, four through nine.' He goes, 'yeah I know, that's right, but no that's not the right gospel.' We talked back and forth and then he informed me that Sundays and Seasons is kind of out of date and doesn't have the correct scripture readings. So, what was I to do? I'm still going to use it along with the introduction to John the Baptist; because he is the one who came to prepare the way of the Lord, to make his paths straight. We're going to talk a little bit about making those paths straight. Of course, it did start with those questions of, 'what shall we do?' that the soldiers and the tax collectors asked. Because John had spoken the Law and the Law condemned them. As we heard last week there was a 3-point answer, basically that John gave them. Share your wealth, honor the trust that is given to you, and don't abuse your power.

Now, I think today we also should be asking that question; what shall we do? What shall we do during Advent as we prepare for Christmas? What shall we do to prepare for life? And I think the answer to the what, comes if we ask the question, why? Why should we share our wealth and our blessings, honor the trust that is given to us, and not abuse power? And you might say, 'well, for salvation.' Because that's how we usually think-transactionally. We talked about that a couple weeks ago in a sermon. And yet we know that has nothing to do with our salvation. Because the wages of sin is death. All of sin and shall and fall

short of the glory of God. No one is righteous, no not one. And by grace we've been saved through faith. It's not our own doing. It's a gift of God not because of works. It's Romans 3; it's Ephesians 2:8-9.

But then, what is the why? Why should we share our wealth and blessings, honor the trust given to us, and not abuse power that's given to us? Let me begin by telling you what it is not. Because that book, Sundays and Seasons gave this idea for a sermon based on those words of John. Listen to this: “John's answers point to equity, generosity and justice. Values that inform Christian efforts to care for God's creation and prevent catastrophic climate change, encourage us to live sustainable lives, and to move toward a plant-based diet.” I read that to pastor Huber and his response was something like ‘Holy balderdash!’ I did do a little bit of translation there, that is not exactly what he said.

But, what then? What then shall we do? With salvation, not for salvation, but with salvation. We know we're saved and so Paul gives us some answers as he writes to the people of Philippi; and he begins by saying, “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.” And when he repeats that it's putting an exclamation point there. Rejoicing in the Lord is not a Sunday issue, it is a seven day a week, 24 hour a day, morning, noon, and night thing. We are to be rejoicing in the Lord. And so, a couple of weeks ago, I challenged you to add two minutes to your prayer life in the morning by praying for people to get into heaven, before you pray to keep people out of heaven. I'd like to add another 30 seconds to a minute. Before you pray for people to get into heaven, start by rejoicing in the Lord. You could do something like, “I thank you Lord for the breath of life and the breath of eternal life that you have given me through your son Jesus Christ. Soli deo Gloria, to You alone be the glory because You alone have done this.” That's rejoicing in the Lord.

Secondly, let your reasonableness being known to everyone. Reasonableness, now there's the hallmark of government and society today, isn't it? Actually, it's the farthest thing from what we see in society today? Reasonableness is not insisting on your own way, and it is rooted in love. Consider what Paul writes in first Corinthians 13; Love does not insist on its own way. And so, what is the result of reasonableness? We actually listen to others, take their thoughts, their ideas into account,

and try to work with them so that there is peace. But also, so that they might come to see Jesus.

And who are we to do this with? Everyone, and I know that is quite a challenge. I'd like you to consider this. In a day and age when the Bible has been removed from the classrooms, whether it's elementary, or up to the university. It's been removed from our courts. It's been removed from public places. It's been removed and you and I might be the only vision of the Word of God people see in the world today. When we live according to it because we are to obey all that Christ has told us. But secondly it goes back to again what we talked about in those sermons, the TWA sermons. We share in the fullness of Christ. So not only might we be their only vision of the written word of God; we might be their only vision of the living Word of God, Jesus Christ.

So, one rejoice; two be reasonable; and three-oh this is a biggie. It's a two-part, three-part answer. And I don't like the first part because it's something that literally, I do suffer from. Do not be anxious about anything; or we could say in nothing be anxious. But then Paul continues, 'and in everything by prayer and supplication and thanksgiving.' There's our first part of a three-part answer. It starts with prayer. I am a person, I suffer from anxiety, I'm on medication for it. When I don't have the medication, man stresses build up. I go to bed at night, I fall asleep in an instant. Two hours later I'd wake up and my mind is just revved up and I go like crazy. And I couldn't get back to sleep. I would pray and usually after an hour or two of praying, I'd go back to sleep.

But that's where we start. Start with prayer, going to God. Why? Because He is the One who can answer our prayers and take away our anxiety. And so, when we pray to Him, we're acknowledging He's the One. He's creator God. He's the One that holds all the answers in His hand. And so, we go to Him, and we praise Him, we rejoice in Him, and then we thank Him, and we ask Him to take care of us.

But then the second thing is supplication. Earnestly praying for each other. That's what Jesus did in the garden when He was praying for His disciples and for us and for Himself. But He prayed so hard that He was sweating, and He suffered hemetradosis, where blood mingles

with the sweat. That's earnest prayer, earnest supplication, and then thanksgiving. Now that you've turned to God, you've put everything in His hands, you now thank Him for His clear vision in the past, His answers to prayer in the past, and in the present, and in the future. Because He is the God who will always do it.

But that's followed by another very unique grouping of three. We'll call it group three- Part 2. But let me begin by using a little bit of example of what Paul is setting up here. I've built a couple houses in my life, the latest is a cabin in the mountains. What's the first thing that you do before you build a house or buy a house? The first thing you do is reflect. You think back on your life, and all the houses you've lived in from the time you were a child to the present. And then you say, you know what; I like this in this house, I like this in this house, I like this in this house, I like this in this house. And then you start to draw your plans and you put what you have learned into those plans. Then once you've got your plans, and your building permit, of course, then you have action. Get the materials, build it.

And so, Paul has started that kind of a progression for us. Step one is to not be anxious, pray. Step two is the reflect part and he says think about these things. What things are we to think about? Whatever is true, and God's word is true, Jesus Himself and His high priestly prayer, in John 17, prayed "sanctify them in the truth, Your Word is truth." What a call for Bible study, and it's number one on Paul's list. Second, reflect on that which is honorable, then just, lovely, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise. Reflect, think about these things. Why? Paul continues, "whatever you have learned, whatever you've received, whatever you've heard, whatever you've seen, as you've done this reflection.

Step 3- practice these things. So, step one pray, because without involving God in this process, it's absolutely futile. If you skipped the first part with God, and praying to God, then you're left with reflecting an action without God. And what does that look like? Well, I'd like you to consider our government and society today. We're doing a boatload of reflecting looking back on every word a person has ever said, everything a person has ever, said looking back to things that happened one

hundred, two hundred, three hundred years ago; reflecting on these things and going straight to action. Making laws and mandates, and all sorts of things like that which has led to a whole lot of confusion, ineffective programs, and even harmful laws, mandates, and practices because it's all been done without God.

But with God, we have salvation, and this is what we do with salvation. We look, we rejoice in the Lord always, we let our reasonableness be seen by everyone, and then we pray, we reflect, we act. This is how we prepare during Advent for Christmas, and this is how we prepare for life. And I want you to think about it, how would you like to be surrounded by people who are always rejoicing in the Lord, who are always reasonable, who are always praying, reflecting on everything, and then acting with the Lord on your behalf? I'd say that'd be a pretty happy situation, wouldn't you?

And really, it's kind of what Disneyland has tied in to. To make every guest feel special. To make it the happiest place on earth. But I will tell you right now, I so disagree with that! The happiest place on earth, it's in Michigan. Pastor Huber would like hearing that and like hearing even more that it's in Frankenmuth, Michigan his old stomping grounds. It's Bronner's Christmas Wonderland or Superstore. Bronner's Christmas Wonderland came about because of a guy named Wally Bronner. Wally Bronner knew that Jesus is the center of Christmas so when we had our *Christ in CHRISTmas drive through* and we capitalize Christ but left the mas in smaller letters, that wasn't my idea. It was Wally Bronner's. Because I went to Bronner's Christmas Wonderland about 40 years ago, and it still sticks in my mind.

Wally Bronner and his wife, they thought about all they had through Jesus. They prayed about all they had through Jesus. They thought about that which was honorable and true and all of that. Do you know what they came up with? The most honorable, true thing that is out there is the birth of Jesus. God sending His Son for a condemned world, so let's put that in action. Let's make a Christmas store that's open 361 days a year and make it all about Christmas. And when people come and walk through the door, we'll give every one of those people a tract with Bible verses and Wally's story which reflects the biblical

account of Jesus and how Jesus saved him. And out of Thanksgiving, out of rejoicing always; because for him every day was Christmas, they built this store that is now one of the 10 biggest businesses in Michigan.

And by the way, when you look at our Nativity Scene that we have out there, that came from Bronner's along with a few other things. It's an amazing place! But it's a place where a man and his wife looked at what God had given them, prayed about it; they reflected on what made them happy, what was true, commendable, and beautiful. The most beautiful thing was Christmas, so they put it into action. And I wonder how many thousands of people have seen Jesus, and have seen His Word as a result?

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, what then shall we do? We shall live with our salvation, rejoice in our salvation, be reasonable and pray, reflect, and act on the things that we learn through the Christmas message. In our Saviors' Name, Amen.