

Our second Scripture this morning is going to come from the gospel of Luke. We read this morning about the character of John the Baptist. Every Advent we read about John the Baptist. That strange character that comes from out of the wilderness to give witness to the coming of Christ. He doesn't come from a place of power and prestige but from the wilderness. John the Baptist is the first prophet in the New Testament.

Read Luke 3:1-18

John is that character that appears and reminds us of our responsibility in preparing for the coming of Christ. He speaks words directly to us who make up the Christian church today. Those of us who smugly think to ourselves that we are somewhat superior to others because we find ourselves in a Christian church during the season of Advent and then on Christmas Eve.

John speaks to those of us who claim that we are somehow special because we can say that our parents raised us up in the Christian faith and that, through them, we claim that Christian faith.

But John the Baptist shouts out to us here today that simply sitting in a Christian church or claiming Christianity as our faith is not what following Jesus Christ is all about. John says that it involves something more than that. "You brood of vipers" he shouts out to all of us who want to simply say that we are Christians.

God can raise up children of Abraham from the stones around you. Simply making some type of profession of faith is not all that there is to following Christ. There is something more.

When the crowds hear John the Baptist say this they ask him what they must do in order to prepare themselves for the coming of the Messiah. To this question John responds with a description of how they must live their life. John says that whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none. Whoever has food must share with those who have none.

And then the business people come and start asking John the Baptist what they must do to prepare to welcome the Messiah into their lives. John says to them that they must be honest and fair in their business practices. That as they treat people fairly they are preparing themselves for the coming of the Messiah.

And then some soldiers come up to John the Baptist and ask him what they must do to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. John tells them that they cannot allow their uniform to be an excuse to treat people unjustly. John tells them that they must use their influence to bring about a more just society.

So what does it look like for us to prepare ourselves to welcome the Messiah? I share a story. This is another story from Katherine Paterson, author of *Bridge to Terabithia*. Last week I shared one of her stories and this week I share another. This is the story about a 16 year old boy.

Read “No Room in the Inn” from Paterson book

So when people look at you and at Allison Creek Presbyterian Church what do they see? Do they see a group of Christians who claim to be Christians because of claiming Abraham as our ancestor? Do they think that we are Christian by what we say or by where we show up on Sunday morning?

Or do people see you as Christian by the way you live out John’s words to give coats to those who have none, food to those who have no food. Do they see that you are Christian by the way you conduct yourself at work? Do they see you as Christian by the way you treat members of your family? Do people see that you are Christian by the way you treat people when you have power and control in a situation?

On Friday as I was in the office Tracy McCarter and her 7 year old daughter Kathryn came into the church building. Tracy cleans the church on Fridays and on this day she had her special assistant Kathryn with her. On that Friday I had driven my Dad's old truck the church which was the only vehicle in the parking lot when they arrived Friday afternoon.

As Kathryn and her mom walked into the church Kathryn asked her Mom who that truck belonged to. Tracy did not know. But then Kathryn said this. "I know we can trust them because they have the church sticker on the back of their truck."

There is at one little 7 year old girl in this world who has learned that she can trust people that have this sticker on the back of their vehicle. Who else is learning from you about how to prepare for the coming of the Messiah? AMEN.

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-Paterson, Katherine, *A Stubborn Sweetness and Other Stories for the Christmas Season*, WJKP, Louisville, 2013, p.151-161 (abridged)

-Given: Dec. 6, 2015 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)