

Luke 3:1-6

³In 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, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³He 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. ⁵Every 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; ⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

Luke 3:7-18

⁷John 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? ⁸Bear 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. ⁹Even 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.” ¹⁰And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” ¹¹In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” ¹²Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” ¹³He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” ¹⁴Soldiers 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.”

¹⁵As 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. ¹⁷His 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.” ¹⁸So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Sermon – St James – December 5 – Advent 2 C

This morning we encounter the arresting presence of John the Baptist...the voice in the wilderness...clothed in designer desert...eating locusts, the local delicacy, proclaiming ‘repent and be baptized’.

Bishop Bill Hockin claims in this week’s Advent talk that John the Baptist has a timely message for us as we live through the Covid 19 pandemic.

If Christmas finds its meaning in the face of Christ. Then Advent finds its meaning in the face of John the Baptist, says Bishop Bill.

John’s message can trigger recovery, can pivot us out of despair toward the release of those endorphins, those natural relaxants. Studies show Endorphins – which reduce stress, are stimulated by prayer, meditation, good relationships at home, participating in life-giving community.

John located himself at the lower end of the Jordan River, 30 km from Jerusalem...a dry and barren place. People came to hear his message in this dry and barren place....John’s message was one of recovery, God was about to do a new thing, to give a second chance and people needed to be ready for it.

John had three asks.

1. The first was to ‘repent’. **Repentance** is an old word – translation – ‘come to your senses’ is what Bishop Hockin likes. It is from Luke 15, the story of the Prodigal Son. The rebellious son ‘comes to his senses’ when he is reduced to eating the food scraps with the pigs. Repentance – is to come to one’s senses – admitting our arrogance and criticism of other people. Repentance is changing direction...turning around, heading toward the light.

Have some of you watched The Crown tv series? In Series 6, Episode 3 – Bishop Bill finds an insightful explorations of faith. Prince Philip is searching spiritually. Watching the Apollo astronauts in the late 60’s, he is transfixed. What men of courage He thinks! Next day in church, he was bored out of his mind. The sermon he thought was a general anesthetic. Soon after he speaks to clergy at a retreat in Windsor Castle – ‘get off your backsides and do something’ was his message. Action is what defines us, not suffering. Then he meets the astronauts – and his esteem crumbles...They are ‘vanilla’...pale faced men with colds, and little capacity for intelligent

conversation...even the greatest humans disappoint. Humbled, at Philip's second meeting with the clergy at Windsor castle...he had a new respect and admiration...He asked them to help him find something better. He found the solution was not the ingenuity of the rocket but accepting one's weakness and finding a grace that will lift you above.

Baptism

John's second ask is '**Come and be baptized**', wash yourself of everything that's negative and start a new life. This baptism ask is unique. No other prophets had asked for that. John ties baptism to wilderness prophetic tradition...which claimed that you will find God in the wilderness...In the wilderness a better future can be re-imagined. It is written in Isaiah 35 'wilderness and dry land shall rejoice, crocus blossom abundantly...so strengthen and say to those with a fearful heart fear not, here comes your God. New life is found not merely by coming to one's senses in the wilderness, but by seeing the miracles happening right **in** the wilderness...the crocuses blooming there.

We have a vaccine against Covid 19! Isn't that a 'miracle in the wilderness'? At first we were told finding a vaccine would take 10 years. But instead, the vaccine took only 4 months not 10 years...Here is a miracle in the wilderness. Kathrin Jenson is a hero here. The secret behind her success is not only skill and laser focus, but a deep-rooted passion for healthcare and pharmaceuticals that stems from her childhood. Jansen grew up in Germany and vividly remembers standing in line for the polio and smallpox vaccines. This led her to an interest in the medical field and a growing passion for vaccines. She... working with Pfizer. Kathrin Jenson God used her to be a miracle. God's crocuses in the wilderness.

John's Third 'ask' – Reinvent Community

The crowds came to John after baptism '**What should we do now?**' they asked. John's answer: Whoever has 2 coats must share and the same with food. This is more than writing a cheque...when you share a coat or food – you make contact...John is saying 'hang out' together. Be there for one another.

Bill Hockin in his talk tells of his grandson, studying business in Guelph, ON. Before the final, the Prof advised his students to study together...The future of the business world lies in being a collaborative experience. If not it will fail. So his grandson did just that. A group got together, Shared common notes and a pizza...How many of us would have benefit by collaborating more?

Timothy Egan writes that ‘A year in a bunker is corrosive to companionship.’ We have all been in a type of bunker. Egan writes: ‘The test of the new normal...is friendship.’ Our connections have been severely tested. Our way forward...our hope is in reinventing ‘community’.

In a world with so much loneliness we can actively seek Circles of grace – where we talk/listen/share deeply...feel God’s presence in the wilderness

John the Baptist has for us this Advent, a message of recovery...which triggers us out of the pandemic of despair. His three asks are:

Repent – come to our senses...change direction.

Baptism - Come to the river, wash away the sands of narcissism and self importance out of our souls.

Reinvent Community – share ourselves in circles of grace...for loneliness feeds our despair...

O Come Divine Messiah

<https://youtu.be/dzNiBdW4Le4>

Bill Hockin

Message of recovery fear, loneliness and anger what we should do spiritually, to find a deeper level, resilience in our wilderness time Timothy Egan...life is never so sweet as in the pivot out of despair. Embracing the endorphins of possibility– God is about to do a new thing in the world

Endorphins – reduce stress science, stimulated by things, including prayer, meditation, good relationships at home, participating in life giving community

Marcus Gee – mental/emotional reservoirs depleted...running on fumes.

Christmas God revealed...those who can say that face...able to pivot out of that despair.

If Christmas finds its meaning in the face of Christ. Then Advent finds its meaning in the face of John the Baptist.

In John's message can trigger recovery, can pivot out of despair

John son of Elizabeth and Zachariah

Prophet...dressed in 'designer desert'

Located himself lower end of Jordan R 30 km from Jerusalem...dry and barren place. People came to hear his message...Gospel of recovery, 2nd chance...God about to do a new thing and need to be ready for it.

John used images from around them –dry lifeless life, a few kms above the dead sea

Repent – change the way you are living, God will forgive

Specific asks John incorporates

1. **Repentance** – old word – translation – 'come to your senses' from Luke 15 Prodigal Son...come to your senses – admitting your arrogance and criticism of other people. Crown – Episode 3 – Insightful explorations of faith. Prince Philip in search for a faith. Watching the Apollo astronauts late 60's. Transfixed. What men of courage. Next day in church bored out of his mind. Sermon general anaesthetic. Speaks to clergy at retreat in Windsor Castle – get off your backsides and do something. Action is what defines us,

not suffering. Meets astronauts – his esteem crumbles...vanilla...pale faced men with colds, little capacity for intelligent conversation...even greatest humans disappoint. Humbled Philip Second meeting at Windsor castle...new respect admiration...help me find something better. Solution not ingenuity of the rocket but it is accepting one's weakness and finding a grace that will lift you above.

2. **Baptism** Come and be baptized, wash yourself of everything that's neg and start a new life. – unique – no other prophets asked for that. Tie baptism to wilderness prophetic tradition...you will find God in the wilderness...re imagine in the wilderness a better future Isaiah 35 'wilderness and dry land shall rejoice, crocus blossom abundantly...so strengthen and say to those with a fearful heart fear not here comes your God. David Brooks convocation address for Boston College/ Reminds the students they are founded on a resurrection...things don't go back to the way they were...everything inverted...salvation and victory comes through wilderness, repentance...not just leaving the wilderness...but seeing what is happening in the wilderness.

At first told vaccine would take 10 years. Vaccine took 4 mos instead of 10 years...miracle in the wilderness Katherine Jenson hero... working with Pfizer. God used her to be a miracle. God's crocuses in the wilderness.

Mary Oliver –

3. Luke 3 – crowds came to John after baptism '**What should we do now?**' Whoever has 2 coats must share and food. Something more than writing a cheque...when you share a coat/food – you make contact...John saying 'hang out' together. Be there for one another.

Grandson, Guelph, ON Prof..study together...business world must be a collaborative experience. If not it will fail. Share common notes...How many of us would have benefited?

Collaboration/Community

Timothy Egan A year in a bunker is corrosive to companionship 'Test of the new normal...friendship.'

Bible studies – excited – Christian community...In a world with so much loneliness

Circles of grace – talk/listen/share deeply...feel God's presence in the wilderness

John the Baptist message of recovery...triggers out of the pandemic of despair

Pivoting out of despair

Repent – come to your senses...

Come to the river wash away the sand out of your souls narcissism self importance

Reinvent Community – loneliness

O Come Divine Messiah