

Advent 2 Repent

There is a place called the Christie property owned by the Kawartha Highlands in the Kawartha Lakes area near Peterborough. This piece of property has a back entrance that comes out at the end of our cottage road which is called "Sheppard Lane." Go figure. Two pastors on Sheppard Lane. It is a regular occurrence for me to take Sophie and Ripley for a walk in the woods. They chase chipmunks. I enjoy the quiet. Prior to last year there were no markers in the bush but several winding paths to walk. Now when I enter, a sign tells me the different routes, how long they are and where they will lead to. I appreciate that because even though I am an adventurer while hiking I don't want to walk for 15 kilometers and then another 15 kms to find my way out unless of course I feel up to it. Regardless of how long I choose to walk and how many chipmunks are not caught by the dogs (which is a good thing), All of the crooked paths lead in a round about way back to where I entered.

Today's text tells us about John on his path of redemption. John the Baptist appeared after being in the wilderness instructing the people (while wearing his crazy coat of leather and camel's fur and eating locusts and wild honey) to "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Then John says, "This is the one of whom the prophet spoke in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'" Just like I do during my walks in the wilderness, the people need some sign on which way to go. John is it.

As John spoke these words, people poured out of Jerusalem, Judea and the Jordanian countryside to see and hear him and to confess their mistakes and be baptized into a changed life.

Things were going well until (here's the kicker!) some Saducees, the wealthy, and the Pharisees, those in authority, came to see John too! They wanted some of that freedom that John was giving out. John didn't send them away but he didn't let them off easy. John made sure to make a firm example of them. Calling them you brood of vipers (you snakes), he warned them that this was no joke. This required a release from your commitments as Saducees and Pharisees because someone much greater than he, was coming, and he requests your faithfulness.

John had a big job and a very important one indeed. John came to tell the people then and his words speak to us now. "You are chosen children of God worthy of love. Prepare for Jesus."

The story in Matthew continues and we are told once Jesus arrives that he is baptized by John, the heavens open, and the Spirit descends like a dove saying, "This is my Son the Beloved which whom I am well pleased." God comes down and chooses to show his love for Jesus and therefore to everyone.

This is an important part two, to John's story of being a baptizer because God's actions are very different than John's. We see and hear God legitimizing Jesus as the Son of Man.

I am humbled knowing that in our own baptism and as Gracelyn is baptised this morning, God chooses to love us. God comes down. He envelopes our hearts with the Holy Spirit and we are his chosen children forever. Being baptized as a child is one of the glorious moments of grace in a little baby's life. No conditions. No judgement. No exceptions. God chooses us all as his children. There might be some that think we should not be allowing just anyone to be baptized. This is anything but the truth. God's love in baptism is free for all. It doesn't matter what path people are on. God chooses to love rather than judge. Remember, that we are all children of God on our own journeys. If we aren't baptized that's okay. We are all created in his image. God still loves. Baptism is a symbol of such love. God takes something ordinary and makes it extraordinary. Water and the Spirit are love as is simply having faith and a relationship with God.

As much as we are chosen children of God, I think it is still very hard sometimes for some of us to feel worth and to feel valued. Occasionally when we pray or confess our wrongdoings we have a hard time leaving our prayers and confessions with God. When we hang on to these we keep ourselves in a state of guilt. Guilt is a hard thing to shake. As John says though, "Repent!" Get rid of the shame! How do we identify repentance? It really isn't definable. Like love it is a feeling.

Now, I want you to think about this. When we are baptized God claims us his own. It's called grace. We are loved forever. Yes this is true. This is also true: God still

desires us to repent. Read the scriptures, the teachings, the parables, the healings, the death and resurrection of Jesus. God desires us to respond to His love and say yes to the call to repentance. Imagine. Just think what we as a congregation, as a wider church could accomplish if we both individually and collectively made our bodies empty vessels pure and clean ready to respond to God's love? I bet all of you at one point or another have had dreams about how your houses , homes, or apartments can be repaired, painted, or expanded.

What if we started to dream about Zion and our own faith? What would our dreams for Zion look like? What would our dreams for our own personal faith look like? What would our dreams for Pembroke and our involvement in our community look like? I leave you with these questions and I encourage you to talk about your dreams with me and each other. Email me. Call me. I would love to dream with you. As you dream remember, that you are loved. That you are chosen. That you are forgiven. That you are a child of God. That you are called to respond. And remember that anything is possible through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.