

Sermon 17

St Philip and St James
Palma de Mallorca Spain
12th December 2021
Third Sunday in Advent

**Theme: Producing Fruit in Keeping with
Repentance**



TEXT: Luke 3: 7-18

Introduction

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen. Today is the Third Sunday in Advent and Christmas is just around the corner. The meaning of advent is twofold: First, we are preparing for the second coming of Christ. Second, liturgically it is the period we prepare for Christmas that is celebrating the incarnation of Christ on His first coming. This means that the immediate focus is Christmas and the ultimate focus is the second coming. Preparations for Christmas are already at advanced stages in many families and communities. I have seen some Facebook postings of some people's homes with pictures of Christmas decorations and our streets are a testimony of heightened preparations. On the 18th November 2021, I read an article from the Majorca Daily Bulletin on the expenditure by the Palma town hall on Christmas Lights and Decorations. The town hall spent 930 000 Euros on Christmas lights and decorations and a further 93 400 Euros was

spent on the switching on of lights show and on other related activities. That is over a million Euros on street lights and decorations alone, what about other related expenditures? This is how the secular world prepares for Christmas, but what about us? During this advent season we reflect on how we are supposed to prepare for the coming of Christ. Few years ago I was invited to preach at Christ Church Cathedral in the diocese of Eau Claire in Wisconsin. This was a few weeks after our enrolment at Nashotah for further studies. I was a little bit nervous, so I consulted my New Testament professor for advice on the preaching culture in America. This was his advice: “In America people want descriptive sermons and not prescriptive ones. So be careful, if you preach prescriptive sermons you will become unpopular.” That was an eye opener for me. Today’s gospel is a typical example of a prescriptive sermon and you will understand why my professor said you will

become unpopular if you preach such sermons here in America.

Exegesis of the Text

Luke chapter 3 begins with a lengthy account of John's proclamation of a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This is one of the harshest sermon introductions I ever read in the entire New Testament. He opened his mouth with a scathing attack on the crowd, **"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath?"** Just imagine myself saying such an introduction in my sermon instead of my usual Trinitarian salutation? How many of you will wait to the end of such a sermon? How many of you will come back to the church next week? The phrase 'brood of vipers' was a common expression at the time indicating those filled with malice. Vipers are venomous and were considered as evil creatures. He is therefore referring to the audience as a family of snakes. This implies that the audience bore satanic qualities and John was pointing out that they were deceitful, dangerous and wicked. Remember this is John the forerunner.

Some refer to him as a bulldozer from heaven. You know how ruthless a bulldozer is when it comes to clearing the path to pave way for smooth construction. It uproots huge trees and pushes big rocks. Listen to his language, **“the axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into fire.”** It is common practice that such a strong message provokes response from the crowd and this is what follows; first, is a question by the crowd. **“What should we do then?”** **“Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”** Surprisingly, this is not something new to the audience. The torah included provisions to provide for the needs of the poor. Landowners were required to leave the edges of their fields unharvested so that the poor people could glean those fields and obtain enough food for survival. The law also made provisions for the next of kin to redeem land sold by a relative. Prophets

also emphasized concern for the poor and condemned ill treatment of widows and orphans. John is therefore pointing the people to the provisions that were already enshrined in their scriptures. Second to respond were the tax collectors, **“teacher they asked, what shall we do?” “Do not collect any more than you are required to?”** These were the Jews **who** have won the bid for collecting tolls, tariffs, and customs duties for Rome. It was a system with high potential for abuse. They could demand more than the prescribed amount and pocket the difference. They were therefore accused of corruption and bribery. Third were the soldiers, **“And what should we do?” “Do not extort money and do not accuse people falsely-be content with your pay.”** These were mostly Jews, possibly in Herod’s service. They were perhaps assigned to protect the toll collectors and to enforce collections. These people too were tempted to coerce excessive payments for personal gain. John does not tell them to quit their jobs and find

new occupations but he instructed them to deal fairly and honestly with people

Application

John's subsequent calls to sharing and honest dealings provide concrete examples of fruits worthy of repentance. We are left with two weeks before Christmas and preparations are at advanced stages though Covid 19 is undoing some of our preparations. This is a period of joy and of sharing God's love. This is the time of sharing God's love with our neighbors. There are many ways of extending God's love to our neighbors. Some of us have closets filled with unworn clothes. Why not share with those with none? Our food bank is almost empty, next time you go shopping, think of those without food and add something to the basket for them. This is what it means: producing fruit worthy of repentance. May the almighty God bless all our Christmas preparations. Amen.

The Rev'd Canon Dr Ishanesu Sextus Gusha
Chaplain