

Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2018

**Third Sunday of Advent**

**Purple**



**Collect**

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at your first coming sent your messenger to prepare your way before you: grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready your way by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at your second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in your sight; for you are alive and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

**Amen**

**Philippians 4:4-7** English Standard Version (ESV)

4<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**COMMENT:** A wonderfully confident faith shines through these few sentences. Paul's expectation of the imminent return of Christ moved him to urge the Philippians to rejoice with him and to conduct themselves in an exemplary manner. The spiritual gifts of gentleness, thanksgiving and peace would keep them free from anxiety as they waited for that glorious day.

**Luke 3:7-18** English Standard Version (ESV)

3<sup>7</sup> He said therefore 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? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. <sup>9</sup> Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

<sup>10</sup> And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?” <sup>11</sup> And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics<sup>[a]</sup> is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” <sup>12</sup> Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” <sup>13</sup> And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.” <sup>14</sup> Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”

<sup>15</sup> As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, <sup>16</sup> John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” <sup>18</sup> So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.

#### **Footnotes:**

a. Greek *chiton*, a long garment worn under the cloak next to the skin

**COMMENT:** John the Baptist’s preaching seems harsh and vituperative to our modern ears, so sensitive as we are to good public relations. Just think of the furor in this country if the Archbishop of Canterbury had spoken like this? To his own generation, John must have appeared to be much like the early prophets of Israel. It is obvious that Luke so regarded him too. Evidence of this is seen in the quotations from Isaiah as found in the Greek Old Testament. Several themes stand out in John’s message: the absolute sovereignty of God in spite of ritual correctness (verses 8-9), far-reaching social justice (verses 10-14), and the promise of a messiah who would come in judgment, not to win a glorious victory over Israel’s enemies (verses 15-17). When people in his audience asked what they were to do, John proclaimed a far-reaching social justice (verses 10-11). He challenged everyone who heard him to share their resources. The naming of specific clothing symbolized the essential necessities of life. His challenge received a significant response from the most unlikely persons – tax-collectors. They were among the most despised people in Israel because they were hirelings of the hated Roman imperial government. When they asked for specific directions for their reform, he attacked the crucial issue in the Roman taxation system. It depended on greed. Hired revenue officers had freedom to exact whatever amount they could, regardless of how much they had contracted to collect. John directed them to limit their revenues to what had been officially prescribed and nothing more. No sane tax collector would consider such a revolutionary approach to his miserable job. John’s challenge extended even to the heart of imperial security forces. When soldiers asked for their directions, he had an equally harsh answer for them. Presumably it was fairly common for soldiers to supplement their wages by extorting bribes from anyone they caught

and imprisoned. To be satisfied with their meagre wages as John required was unthinkable. These two sets of questioners should be regarded as examples rather than a total list of those who responded to John's harsh message. Every Jew would immediately think of the expected Messiah. Hence their questioning whether or not he himself was the Messiah. John's answer to that speculation described a messiah who would come in judgment, not to win a glorious victory over Israel's oppressors as the popular messianic tradition held (verses 15-17). Luke may have had in mind the moral depravity of Graeco-Roman society of his own time, exemplified by Herod Antipas, the puppet king whose moral degradation John denounced most vociferously. Without question, a significant part of the catechesis of the early church included teaching new Christians to lead a life very different morally than that to which they had been accustomed before their conversion. In those days as in ours, love for God and neighbour generated totally different quality of life and depth of sacrifice than the way most people lived. The challenge today for every Christian personally in every walk of life and for every Christian congregation is to demonstrate to an unbelieving world that there is a difference in the Christian way. This was Luke's message as he described John the Baptist as the prophetic forerunner for the Messiah/Christ.

### **Psalm 146** *Lauda, anima mea* Grail Psalter

#### **℟ My soul, give praise to the Lord**

<sup>1</sup> Alleluia!

My soul, give praise to the Lord;

<sup>2</sup> I will praise the Lord all my days,  
make music to my God while I live. ℟

<sup>3</sup> Put no trust in princes,  
In mortal men in whom there is no help.

<sup>4</sup> Take their breath, they return to clay  
and their plans that day come to nothing. ℟

<sup>5</sup> He is happy who is helped by Jacob's God,  
whose hope is in the Lord his God,

<sup>6</sup> who alone made heaven and earth,  
the seas and all they contain. ℟

It is he who keeps faith for ever,

<sup>7</sup> who is just to those who are oppressed.

It is he who gives bread to the hungry,  
the Lord, who sets prisoners free, ℟

<sup>8</sup> the Lord who gives sight to the blind,  
who raises up those who are bowed down,

<sup>9</sup> the Lord, who protects the stranger  
and upholds the widow and orphan. ℟

<sup>8c</sup> It is the Lord who loves the just  
<sup>9c</sup> but thwarts the path of the wicked.  
<sup>10</sup> The Lord will reign for ever,  
Zion's God, from age to age. Alleluia!  
**✠ My soul, give praise to the Lord**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit,  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.**

**COMMENT:** The prophetic theme of hope of restoration sounds through the latter part of this song of praise, one of five psalms that end the Psalter. It sings the praise of the LORD as creator and redeemer, especially of those who are powerless and marginalised. Verses 7b-9 repeats the name of the LORD five times, always translated “the Lord.” Originally the name ‘Yahweh’ would have been voiced, but the name of God became considered so sacred, that it was replaced by the tile “Lord” rendered “LORD” in English bibles to show the divine name lies behind the replacement. One can imagine those familiar with the words joining their voices to the cantor in a jubilant crescendo as the divine name was recited. Then in the closing benediction proclaiming the eternal sovereignty of the LORD, the congregation responds with a final outburst of praise.

### **Short Preface**

And now we give you thanks because you sent him to redeem us from sin and death and to make us inheritors of everlasting life; that when he shall come again in power and great triumph to judge the world, we may with joy behold his appearing, and in confidence may stand before him.

### **Post Communion**

We give you thanks, O Lord, for these heavenly gifts; kindle in us the fire of your Spirit that when your Christ comes again we may shine as lights before his face; who is alive and reigns now and for ever. **Amen**

### **Blessing**

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you, scatter the darkness from before your path, and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit