

Advent III: A Home for All (Joy) Zephaniah 3:14-20; Luke 3:1-18
Rev. Michele Ward December 12, 2021
Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church Baltimore, MD

One: The Gospel reading this morning comes from the book of Luke, chapter three, verses 1 through 18. Listen now for a Word from God.

In 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,
during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas,
the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

He went into all the region around the Jordan,
proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,
as 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.
Every 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;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

John 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?
Bear 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.
Even 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.”

And the crowds asked him,
“What then should we do?”

In reply he said to them,

Advent III: A Home for All (Joy) Zephaniah 3:14-20; Luke 3:1-18

Rev. Michele Ward December 12, 2021

Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church Baltimore, MD

“Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none;
and whoever has food must do likewise.”

Even tax collectors came to be baptized,
and they asked him,
“Teacher, what should we do?”

He said to them,
“Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.”

Soldiers 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.”

As the people were filled with expectation,
and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John,
whether he might be the Messiah,
John 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.
His 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.”

So, with many other exhortations,
he proclaimed the good news to the people.

One: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church. **All: Thanks be to God.**

Advent III: A Home for All (Joy) Zephaniah 3:14-20; Luke 3:1-18
Rev. Michele Ward December 12, 2021
Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church Baltimore, MD

PRAY: In these days of long nights and cold days, fill us with your joy everlasting. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing and acceptable to you, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

At the beginning of this chapter Luke sets the scene. He tells us about all of the baddies in the Roman Empire that are running the show. Tiberius Caesar, Herod and his brother Philip--Luke wants us to know which political and religious voices John the Baptist was speaking against while he taught and led others in the wilderness. This opening matters because context is important. It would be like listing the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. or Malcom X without any idea about the era or the cultural climate in which they lived and breathed. John the Baptist's words transcend the moment in history when he spoke them, which is why they are included in the Gospel of Luke in the first place. Although John the Baptist spoke these words long ago, they still resonate today as we hear them this morning.

John the Baptist pulls no punches. His prophetic message may be hard to hear, but underneath that harshness is a joyful

Advent III: A Home for All (Joy) Zephaniah 3:14-20; Luke 3:1-18

Rev. Michele Ward December 12, 2021

Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church Baltimore, MD
message. He quotes the prophet Isaiah, imagining a world where

“valleys are lifted up and crooked ways are made straight.” He proclaims that world to his disciples as they come to him in the wilderness seeking direction and longing for answers. He proclaims these words to everyday people, to Roman soldiers, and to tax collectors--all types of people are drawn to his words and a dream of another way of living. And what he gives them is not a battle cry to overthrow the Roman Empire, but it is a vision of a world they can create with God. It is a vision of a world that requires them to consider others, to live with empathy, and to share what they have. He gives them a vision of a home where every person has enough to wear, everyone has enough money to provide for their needs, everyone has enough food to eat and does not go hungry, and everyone is treated fairly by representatives of the Roman government and religious leadership.

Our Advent theme this year, “Close to Home,” draws our attention to our longing for a place to lay our heads and a place to belong. This reminds me of The Highwomen’s song “Crowded Table”: *I want a house with a crowded table/And a place by the fire*

Advent III: A Home for All (Joy) Zephaniah 3:14-20; Luke 3:1-18

Rev. Michele Ward December 12, 2021

Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church Baltimore, MD
*for everyone/Let us take on the world while we're young and
able/And bring us back together when the day is done*

That is the kind of home, the kind of world, that John the Baptist imagines for us this morning. Red Shed Village - St. Michael's & All Angels - creating a home for everyone when the world around us said it wasn't a good idea. It was March 2020 - outbreaks in the shelter system, lack of safety for trans and queer people experiencing homelessness, and a group of Central Baltimore clergy met to discuss what to do, and we decided to try something out and see what happened.

We came up with the idea to create a tent village at Red Shed Garden on St. Paul while we waited out the first few months of the pandemic. We thought we would only need to have these emergency shelters in place for three months. Well, those three months turned into six months. And then six months turned into nine months, and the first winter of the pandemic was fast approaching.

We started a campaign to fundraise to build tiny houses in the garden, with the permission of the Red Shed Garden leadership, in place of the tents, with the goal of helping residents transition from the street to the village to permanent housing. We successfully

Advent III: A Home for All (Joy) Zephaniah 3:14-20; Luke 3:1-18

Rev. Michele Ward December 12, 2021

Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church Baltimore, MD

raised enough money to build tiny houses on the garden property, and did that in time to keep residents warm for the winter and out of the elements. We attracted the attention of Baltimore City's Office of Homeless Services, and they came out for a site visit to see what we were doing at Red Shed Village. They were astonished to see that we had created a small ecosystem that was offering support and community, shelter and resources, and it was successfully rehabilitating people, one person at a time.

If you walk down St. Paul today, you will see green tiny houses, with murals painted on them depicting flowers and vines. You will see people sitting around a firepit, sharing their joys and sorrows. You will see neighbors building relationships with neighbors, whether they live in apartments, or houses, or tents. You will see a community of people who care for one another, all because the pandemic kicked local pastors and leaders into high gear. The need for something like the Red Shed Village was there all along, but it took an emergency for us to see the need for a community like this in Central Baltimore.

Advent III: A Home for All (Joy) Zephaniah 3:14-20; Luke 3:1-18

Rev. Michele Ward December 12, 2021

Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church Baltimore, MD

John Baptist sings out to us this morning in the words of The

Highwomen's "Crowded Table": *I want a house with a crowded table/And a place by the fire for everyone/Let us take on the world while we're young and able/And bring us back together when the day is done*

John declares a world of justice and equity, a world where all have what they need, no one is unhoused, hungry, or naked, no one is manipulated by money lenders or people with political power. This world is not that far off--it is around the corner, down the street, in your rearview mirror. All we need to do is look.