

## Gospel lesson

Today we continue in the Gospel of Luke, right from where we left off last week with John the Baptist:



*picture reversed from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/john-baptist/>*

### Luke 3:7-18

(NRSV)

<sup>7</sup> 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?"

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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."

<sup>10</sup> And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?"

<sup>11</sup> In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise."

<sup>12</sup> Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?"

<sup>13</sup> He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount

prescribed for you."

<sup>14</sup> 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."

<sup>15</sup> As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah,

<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> 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."

<sup>18</sup> So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

*The word of God for the people of God*

<Children's time>

What is under the tree? <Let them respond>

Who do you usually exchange gifts with?  
<Let them respond>

Why do you exchange gifts with them?

<Let them respond>

What is the most precious gift you can give?

<Let them respond>

Memories are made from the way we interact with others, how we make them feel. They remember you not so much for a specific item you gave them as for the care shown by you for them.

What is the most precious gift God gave us?

<Let them respond>

Without opening it, select a gift from under the tree and sit here with it. What do you think is inside your package? <Let them respond>

What is your hope for Christmas? <Let them respond>

Go ahead and open it. What is there? Is it what you expected or hoped? <Let them respond>

The pen has the name of our church on it, as a reminder of where you are always welcome to learn more about Jesus and the love of God. I do need the boxes back, but you can take the pens with you and use them wherever you like.

<Pray with them>

<Hymn "Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart"

UMH #160>

## Message: Presence



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/come-let-us-adore-him/third-sunday-of-advent-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/third-sunday-of-advent-year-c-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Loving Lord always with us,  
as we take time now to further consider today's  
scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may rejoice in Your presence whenever and  
wherever we are, and share Your gift of love with  
others. Amen.

We continue our Advent series today with "Presence":

"Gaudete Sunday holds a special place in many  
congregations with a gathering full of music, joy,  
and light as we get closer and closer to the  
darkest night of the year."

I've always loved Christmastime with all the pretty  
lights, happy music, and anticipation of sharing  
gifts. It's fun to open up something, not knowing  
exactly what is inside.



picture from MMMS collection

When I was a kid, I thought of mail that way. My parents would get a bunch of letters everyday – back then I did not realize how much of it was bills and junk mail – and I would not get anything. When I complained about that to my mother, she asked me, “Have you sent any letters? You have to send it to receive it.”

That idea of reciprocity was pretty eye-opening for me as a child, especially in that I had to initiate the changes I wanted to see. If I wanted someone to write to me, I had to write to them first. I found it pretty much applies to relationships in general, that if I want someone to talk with me, or walk with me, or share time with me, it is more likely to happen if I reach out to talk with them, or walk with them, or share my time with them.



picture cropped from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/people-walking-on-road-between-high-rise-buildings-1461378/>;  
credit: Vlad Alexandru Popa

Unfortunately, it seems like we get bombarded with a lot of junk interactions, especially on social media and all of the advertising thrown at us wherever we turn around. It seems like very little of what strives for our attention is anything that actually cares about us.

Yet, God cares and is waiting patiently for us to accept the invitation of renewed relationship laid

before us, ready to bless us abundantly with love.



*picture screencaptured from  
[https://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=pB3JKyoYOh8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pB3JKyoYOh8);  
credit: LUMO*

The same was true even for the Israelites back in the days of the Old Testament prophets. We just read about how the people – otherwise besieged by enemies, disaster, shame, and fear – praised the Lord for removing all that aftermath of sin and bringing them peace and joy as children of God.

The apostle Paul similarly exhorted the church in Philippi to rejoice and trust in the Lord, living in the peace of God made available to us through Jesus.

But it is not simply a matter of accepting handouts and otherwise ignoring the giver. Relationships require input from both sides. John the Baptist reminded the people about this – it was not enough just to be descended from Abraham; they needed to respond to God’s blessings by spreading the love and justice inherent in those blessings. They were told:

- † To share surplus of goods with those who have none;
- † To be honest in dealings with others, not greedily forcing more out of them than was due; and
- † To be satisfied with having enough.

The same is true for us today. Greedy/destructive

behavior aimed at getting ahead (and all the fear and worry that goes with that) goes away when we focus on nurturing one another in love instead. Life is not about getting and giving presents in terms of stuff; it is about sharing one another's presence - being together in the healthiest way we can.

So, just as the people asked of John the Baptist, what do we do?



*picture from*

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/come-let-us-adore-him/third-sunday-of-advent-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/third-sunday-of-advent-year-c-graphics>

First, let God be present with you. Take time to pray, read scriptures; make worship a priority.

Then, carry God's love and peace to others. Learn about them and see where you can help them become more fully the best people they can be.

Repeating that in all aspects of our lives is how we build community in God's grace, celebrating the presence of each person in our lives as the gift from God that they are.