

The Gospel Lesson for today is read from Luke 3:15-22

Hear the words from the disciple Luke:

Read Luke 3:15-22

“The Word of God for the people of God.”

“Thanks be to God”

Let us pray:

Creating, Calling, and Faithful God, we come to this time and place to be with you, to worship you, and to learn from you. May our time together in hearing your word preached be like your creation of light in the darkness that you called good. May it be that you would call us good while we respond to your call and as we listen to you. Amen.

Intro:

If you can remember this far back, about a month ago, we were here in Luke 3. On Gaudete Sunday, also known as “Rejoice Sunday”. Although Luke’s account of John the Baptist and him calling us a “brood of vipers” and bringing the fire and brimstone preaching to repent was not so joyous... Here we finally receive the Good News from Luke.

Over the past month, during the Advent and Christmas seasons we’ve bounced around all over the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We’ve made it through the anticipation of Jesus Christ coming and preparing the way for Jesus by repentance as John the Baptist calls us to. We made it through the birth narratives of Jesus’ birth and through the epiphany that Jesus IS Immanuel, God with us now finally revealed to us.

EXPECTATION

Now, the lectionary gospel lesson for today puts us right back in Luke 3 (v.15) with the people who “were filled with **expectation** . . .”

Those people in Israel who were still waiting for a Messiah, a king, who would right the wrongs of their current reality and restore Israel. A king who would come and resolve their problems. Many who were gathering were wanting to be baptized by John in **expectation that something would soon happen — the Messiah was coming so let us change ourselves before He comes. I don’t see how this is any different than a resolution; a declaration, a decision, a covenant with God to change.**

since it is now the new year, it is time for new resolutions. Do you know the top 10 resolutions this year?

Here are the top 10 New Year's resolutions according to a survey of 2,000 people:

1. Diet or eat healthier (71 percent)
2. Exercise more (65 percent)
3. Lose weight (54 percent)
4. Save more and spend less (32 percent)
5. Learn a new skill or hobby (26 percent)
6. Quit smoking (21 percent)
7. Read more (17 percent)
8. Find another job (16 percent)
9. Drink less alcohol (15 percent)
10. Spend more time with family and friends (13 percent)

Think back to last year. Do any of these sound familiar? As we make resolutions we find that we put expectations to meet and stick to those resolutions we make. What expectations did you have for yourself last year? Has anything changed?

EXPECTATION REALIZED IS A GIFT

Not many people reach their expectations for themselves b/c they're such big goals and bring such big changes in their lives. But when they start small and make a lot of little changes and see they've met their resolutions through small changes and then realize it's a big deal! They've accomplished something truly special to them and they cannot wait to tell others about what has happened. For example:

I have a friend Chris, who only missed 7 days going to the gym last year.

That's an impressive covenant to keep and he still won't stop talking about it.

But, that's a gift he gave himself. When was the last time you gave yourself a gift like that and you could not wait to tell someone? Maybe it was a new car? How about the last time you received something and you could not wait to tell someone? Maybe an engagement ring? I know my fiancé Kendall could NOT wait! Often the full joy of the gift is not fully realized until you finally tell someone.

So what about this gift, this resolution, this covenant, this promise of baptism?

Some of you may have never been baptized.

Some of you were baptized more recently; some confirmed the baptism of your childhood; and for some, perhaps it has been many years since your baptism.

What do you remember leading up to that moment? Or, what did your parents or guardians tell you about that moment? Who was present? What did it mean to them? What did it mean to you?

My Baptism story....

Yet, (15) . . . all were questioning in their hearts . . .

At the same time, the people gathered were questioning whether or not John the Baptist was the messiah. (16) John answered all of them by . . . (pointing to Jesus)

Much of my experience around baptism remains a mystery, a mystery that God continues to help unravel question by question in my life. What I have learned is that God was always there and always will be there for me. In the Wesleyan tradition, we call this **prevenient grace** — a **grace that goes before us**. This is why we baptize children in the United Methodist Church. **God's gift of grace is always present in our lives**. If we were not baptized as children, it does not mean that God's grace was not present. A loving God is constantly reaching out, wanting to be at the center of our lives. And although we might still have questions even into adulthood, we are drawn to Jesus, like a magnet, just as John drew in those gathered who were seeking a Messiah.

At some point, each of us usually craves more — a deeper understanding of life and our purpose in it. Sometimes we feel God calling, knocking and we feel a deep need to respond, to answer that door. It is different for each of us. For some, there is a distinct moment that we can recall and point to (i.e. a place, date, or time). For others, it might be a series of moments over time, drawing us closer and closer to God – very much like a chapter book.

As adults, baptism can be a moment when we clearly see a gift held in outstretched loving arms, and we say **YES**. Through this gift, we find a new beginning, a newness in life. We find union with Christ, God's Spirit filling our lives, and true belonging to Christ's community. A moment when we hear a small voice of God saying, “I love you. You are my son. You are my daughter. I will love you forever.”

Most describe during this moment a different feeling flowing through us, a warm peaceful assurance that blankets us — that's grace — that's God's Spirit — that's love. And from that moment on, we are forever changed, placed on a path following Jesus. So, we may make

each year for ourselves any of the top 10 resolutions. But I challenge you that this year you resolve to give into God’s calling on your life. Make your number one resolution be that you live out that newness in your new life made possible only by God’s gift of the Holy Spirit poured out for you. And as we are drawn closer and closer to God, we are made more and more into the likeness of Christ. And we see this through the Holy Spirit working within us – making real the fruits of our labor through feeding the hungry, healing the sick, caring for the poor, the lost, the lonely widows and orphans, and proclaiming the revealed truth, the Good News from the gospels.

Let us pray:

For John the Baptist
preparing the way by repentance and baptism
we thank you
For Jesus Christ
proclaimed your Son by water and Spirit
we thank you
For Good News
that Salvation has come to the earth
we thank you
For your love
undeserved and graciously given
we thank you
For the Holy Spirit
transforming and empowering lives
we thank you
For your promise
of an eternity in which to praise you
we thank you¹

¹ http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers_Epiphany.htm#ixzz5cUSD3xYa

Invitation to the Offering

Your offering last week empowered ministry within our congregation and in response to the needs of our community. It also supported the work of our General Commission on General Conference, which has responsibility for the planning required for bringing together more than 2,000 people (860 delegates, plus alternates, press, and visitors) in St. Louis, MO, in February for a historic Special Session of General Conference. Our connectional giving means that this meeting can be a global gathering with representation from wealthy countries and poor countries, bringing all voices to the discussion. This ministry happens, thanks to the way the people of The United Methodist Church live and give connectionally. I invite you to give generously, as we worship God through sharing our gifts, tithes, and offerings.