

# Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, Dec 15, 2019 – Advent 3 - Joy

## Bearing Good Fruits

(Ps 146 and Luke 3:8-9)



**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 of 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."**

**(Luke 3:8-9)**

### Insights from the story within the story

Our story from Luke this morning, on this 3rd Sunday of Advent, when we consider the theme of joy, seems a bit out-of-place – it's about John the Baptist – a weird outcast – an angry young man – preaching from a place of fear – a place of anger – a place of judgement – all of these dire warnings about axes, and felled trees, and consuming fires are graphic and threatening – repent or else! - and there were some among the Israelites, especially in the depressed and oppressed countryside, that gave him their attention and loyalty – as I read Luke now, I see John the Baptist as a key transition figure from the older tradition of the angry, threatening prophets to the newer tradition revived and amplified in Jesus – John himself is keen to draw the contrast in the words that follow the passage Ben read this morning – what John does point to in our passage this morning that I think bears consideration is the idea of bearing the fruits of repentance – in such bearing we find the true source of joy as human beings – being in sync with, aligned to, participating in, the new community of all creation that God has accomplished in Jesus Christ – that's the shift from John to Jesus – from threatening imposition to joyful offering and acceptance – the free and humble gift of friendship with God instead of a rigid set of beliefs and rules imposed by an angry tyrant

### Provocative points to ponder – as always, too many to cram into one sermon

- Gratitude for that gift, that is offered to all flesh, as we saw last week, is the source of the praise we heard in Ps 146 – hope given by the faithfulness of the Creator of all things, justice, food, freedom, sight, worth, encouragement, respect – ideas we find repeated in Jesus' first public sermon on a text from Isaiah that focuses on these good fruits – in Paul, they come through as the fruits of the Spirit, especially in Galatians – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,

faithfulness, gentleness, self-composure – we often think of these, in our moralistic culture, as behaviours we should do, things we have to do to satisfy a judging God – but the Psalmist, Isaiah, Jesus, Luke, and Paul see them as qualities of God first and foremost, then gifts us through the work of the Holy Spirit – that power of God’s energy that continues to guide us into the joys of companionship with God in Jesus Christ – words that point to the reality of relationships with and in God that defy descriptions and categories – where joyous praise captures a glimpse of the fullness of this grace – I pray that happens here at Brentwood in our worshiping more often than not

### **How does this apply to our mission here at Brentwood?**

Advent is a time of expectation, of anticipation – waiting for God to come yet again – it’s a ritual that reminds us of important relationships and the good fruits that grow from them – but being clear about the source of those expectations is crucial to how we frame them, how we understand them – if we construct God as an angry tyrant who commands compliance, we will have certain kinds of expectations – they may very well lead us to the fears and condemnations that we find in John the Baptist – but if we take Jesus as the person in whom the grace and truth of God is incarnate, God accommodating to our abilities to understand, then we find a God who freely gives in nourishing the good fruits that enable the who creation to flourish – that’s what the psalmist is praising, what Paul is celebrating, and what Jesus is proclaiming – and we are freed of our fears to bear those good fruits to all who we encounter – may this time together in worshiping strengthen you all in that mission

### **My Notes**

### **My Prayers**

