



Grain

“What we believe about God will tell us what we believe about people; and what we believe about people will tell us what kinds of communities and societies we believe we should strive to create.”

–Brenda Salter McNeil

Field

⁷ John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance, and 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. ⁹ Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

Thoughts

John the Baptist was having an extremely confrontational day; perhaps he had a lot of those days. But he didn’t reserve his biting words, “You brood of vipers,” for a select few, the way some can use vulnerable people to take their anger out on. You wonder if John the Baptist was angry at all. Did he have righteous anger, or did he just feel moved to say what he needed to in an “I’m-not-messing-around-here sort of way? Whatever the answer, we know that unlike expressions of anger that end up harming others and ourselves, John’s words were focused on waking people up to experience the urgency to repent.

John was an equal opportunity agitator. Anyone could repent, just as anyone could experience the kind of love and forgiveness that accompanies repentance. Repentance and forgiveness were for everyone, which is a striking part of this story. Some people with status, even ones who were accustomed to declaring the word of God, were now in the desert being challenged next to people without status. Those who felt superior and inferior to each other were together listening to the same message.

You don’t need to have all the privileges in life to be tempted to feel above others and become complacent about loving your neighbor. So, John’s confrontational words could have pierced the egos of some who had little or no standing in their communities and struggled to get by. But did some also find an advocate in John? Those more vulnerable might have wondered, who is this prophet equalizing the crowd and calling out the arrogance of people who looked down on us, and mixing us all together? Repenting, as well as entering the waters of baptism meant sharing their humanity with one another.

Advent is a time to reflect. What are ways we need to repent viewing ourselves as superior to others or being stuck in complexes of inferiority? How are we called to be in solidarity with one another and civically hold power accountable?

Let us continue to prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, who embodied divinity and shared our humanity. Happy Monday!

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Many blessings upon you,

Pastor Cindy