

**Title: I will, with God's help.**

**Luke 3:3-18**

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**Objectives:**

- The mix of waiting and action is God's call, preparation for and enacting our baptism vows.
- In the doing, sharing, living justly is the basic expression of faith as followers of Christ.
- The act of living is the place of God's purification; of falling down and getting back up again.
- Listen to your heart cry, take courage. Do it with God's help.

**Introduction:**

That moment when you leave a retreat, a vacation, a time of stillness and you cross back into the real world, where chores, errands, responsibilities await.

It's that moment on the ferry when you check your emails for the first time after a long break. And you feel the heavy weight on your shoulders.

Sometimes a sense of rest, of God's peace – collides with the doing of our lives. And it is most overwhelming when we have to cross the threshold and climb back into everyday life.

John the Baptist's first disciples follow him out into the wilderness.

And the first words recorded out of the prophet's mouth are:

“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from what was to come?”

John baptizes the crowd and then he sends them back into the rough and tumble of their lives. The lifestyles that they were hastily leaving.

**For John knows this – the hard work of becoming like Christ is as much about stillness in the wilderness as it is about a life lived with intention.**

**Poet, author and speaker David Whyte** describes this moment well...

He asks us to picture a monk, standing on the edge of the monastic precinct in the old Celtic Christian days, hearing the sound of a bell calling him to prayer. And he says to himself, “That's the most beautiful sound in the world.” That's where I need to go to meet God and have my life transformed.

But, he says, “in the Irish imagination, nothing is ever singular or simple, and at the same time as hearing the bell, he hears a blackbird calling from outside of the monastic precinct. And he says to himself, “That's also the most beautiful sound in the world.”

I wonder if I should walk outside the monastery and discover what God has for me there?

Whyte says: that “we are left contemplating the man standing there, and you’re not told which way he goes, because, of course, in the real conversation of life, we have no choice”. It is both of these things.

We are called to a deeper sense and context of ourselves, and we’re asked to actually meet life as we find it. There’s always the great question, “Should I actually go deeper, to a deeper context, a deeper understanding of myself and the whole situation before I actually hurl myself at reality? Or should I do something now?”

Of course, as real human beings in real human communities and families and relationships, we do not get to choose between the two. We always have to deepen, and we always have to be present in the world at the same time.

And Whyte writes a poem that expresses this internal movement between “The Bell and the Blackbird.”

“The sound / of a bell / still reverberating, // or a blackbird / calling / from a corner / of the / field. // Asking you / to wake / into this life / or inviting you / deeper / into one that waits. // Either way / takes courage, / either way wants you / to walk / to the place / where you find / you already know / you’ll have to give / every last thing / away. // The approach / that is also / the meeting itself, / without any / meeting / at all. // That radiance / you have always / carried with you / as you walk / both alone / and completely / accompanied / in friendship / by every corner / of the world / crying / Allelujah.”

*Accessed online: <https://onbeing.org/programs/poetry-from-the-on-being-gathering-david-whyte-opening-night-sep2018/>*

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John the Baptist’s imagery is not of bells and blackbirds but rather his imagery is of a fire of the Spirit that spreads, and of snakes that slither off into the wilderness afraid.

Of an ax that lies at the base of a tree waiting to make the chop if fruit cannot be seen on the tree...

And of a winnowing fork threshing the wheat - separating the grain from the chaff...

Three metaphors – three images of purification.

Burning, pruning and threshing.

Purification that happens in the very doing of our lives.

For that is the crowds question. The soldiers question. The tax collectors question.

“What then should we do?”

John baptizes the crowd and then he sends them back into the rough and tumble of their lives. The lifestyles that they were hastily leaving. Continue as a tax collector, as a soldier – just do it differently.

On the first day of preschool – parents bring their children here to St Catherine’s – into the capable hands of Marion, Tina and the teachers. Knowing that in order for children to learn, to grow, to become... they will need to leave safety of their homes and walk a new path. To participate in a bigger life, to try, to fail.

This is a similar pattern of our becoming...  
Becoming Christians, becoming followers of Christ. Followers of the way.

It is both a movement into stillness, safety – a place where we are confronted.  
And invited to turn from ways that harm others, ourselves and God.  
And it is a movement back into life – becoming... as we try again.

**The hard work of becoming like Christ is as much a walk in the wilderness as it is a life lived with intention.**

This intention that lives out our Baptism vows.

- Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself?  
**I will, with God’s help.**
- Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?  
**I will, with God’s help.**
- Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of God’s creation/earth and respect, sustain and renew the life of the Earth?  
**I will, with God’s help.**

**And we (or are community on our behalf) says yes to this on the day we are Baptised and every time we affirm our faith.**

**“I will – with God’s help” For we dare not do it alone.**

When we are asked if we have been baptised, like the ancestral lineage of Abraham for John’s disciples, the answer doesn’t lie in the book that the Priest filled in, or our certificates, or the memory of that date back then.

The answer lies in a life that bears fruit, a life of one who dares to trust God in word and action.  
“I will with God’s help.”

What holds me back?

The fear for me has always been – am I enough? Can I do this?

Will I just fall on my face and make a public fool of myself?

Too embarrassed to say that I follow Christ, in case I don’t live up to the call and people laugh at me.

And yet there is in me a heart cry.  
The Spirit of Christ cries out with my spirit.

It's a voice deep within that will not let me go another way.  
And when I ask: What then should I do?

It answers with the prophet Micah:  
"Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God".

And it echoes John the Baptist's answers to the crowd, the soldiers and tax collectors:  
Be fair and honest in all you do – even if it's different from what others do and draws attention to yourself.

And when you see someone who has nothing, share what you have.  
And don't take more than you need.

When I ponder on these things, the fire in me is alight.  
For this is my hearts cry.

And somehow in the midst of fear, the courage rises and I step back into the arena of life.  
No matter what others might think of me.

**In 1910 USA president Theodore Roosevelt delivered a speech in Paris, France.**

**That is worth reading regularly:**

"It is not the critic who counts; not the person who points out how the strong one stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better.

The credit belongs to the person who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred with dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends themselves in a worthy cause;

Who at best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if they fail, at least fails while daring greatly"

*Cited in Brene Brown: Daring Greatly*

I will with God's help.

**Because it is not for me. I am a preparer. I prepare the way for Christ.**

Amen