

Date: December 16, 2018 (Advent 3, Year C)

1. Texts: Zephaniah 3:14-20; Canticle 3; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: lifestyle evangelism.
4. Aim: guide, inspire.
5. Proposition: "Faith must be expressed in lifestyle as well as in our speech."

FAITHFILLED LIVING, LIVING FAITHFULLY

When I allow myself to actually feel the honour, I am nearly overwhelmed by the privileges of being chosen.

I have been chosen by various communities to play leading roles in society on committees and boards.

I was chosen by my spouse to not only be a lover and companion, but one of the parents to our children.

I was chosen by God to represent Christ in his Church.

Whatever the circumstance, somebody saw something in me and said, "I want you to be a part of whatever this is I'm about." I have been chosen.

In Christian terms, all of us have been chosen. Jesus said so.

You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.¹

Jesus has seen something in us and wants us to be a part of whatever he is about. We have been chosen. We disciples of Christ are the new chosen people of God.

Having chosen us, Jesus does have clear expectations of us: he expects that we will bear fruit, fruit that will endure, whatever that kind of fruit is. He made that expectation clear in a parable:

'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener,

¹ John 15:16.

“See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?” He replied, “Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”²

The expectation is clear, even if the exact nature of the fruit isn’t immediately clear.

Actually, the New Testament gives us some ideas about the fruit which Jesus is expecting and this started with John the Baptist.

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. Even now the axe 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.’³

I know that the language is a bit, well, inflammatory, but John was clear: our fruit should reflect our repentance. That is, our repentance in front of God is to be reflected in our lifestyle.

This gives us an important clue about fruit which Jesus expects: “fruit” is actually the reflection of our saving faith in our lifestyles. The fruit that he expects is our faith made tangible, visible and knowable. In the case of John the Baptist, the expectation was that the repentance would be made practical and doable in the daily lives of people.

St. Paul made this beautifully clear in the Letter to the Galatians: “By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”⁴ Such are the fruit of the kingdom by which disciples of Jesus will be definitively known.⁵

² Luke 13:6-9.

³ Luke 3:8-9.

⁴ Galatians 5:22-23a.

⁵ Matthew 12:33; Luke 6:39-49.

Such fruit is the fruit which Jesus expects will last. This is the fruit of the kingdom for which we have been pruned.⁶

It is for such fruit that we have been chosen by Christ. We are privileged to be his “fruit-bearers”, those disciples who reflect our saving faith in our daily words and actions. As we do that, God’s kingdom will be built up and others will experience that same salvation. This is the fruit that will endure, the fruit for which we have been chosen.

Good God! This is the point at which we should be overwhelmed! God has chosen us for this privilege. People, we cannot let this go by unnoticed. We are chosen. We are privileged. We are the fruit-bearers of Christ.

So now, let’s figure out how we will do this. John the Baptist made this very practical.

And the crowds asked [John], ‘What then should we do?’ In reply he said to them, ‘Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.’ Even tax-collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, ‘Teacher, what should we do?’ He said to them, ‘Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.’ 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.’⁷

John made it clear: we bear the fruit by

- ✓ living justly and righteously,
- ✓ taking care of the poor and disadvantaged,
- ✓ being professional and just in our jobs, and
- ✓ by refusing to use violence to get our own way.

<p>These bullet points + the fruit of the Spirit can be projected, put on posters or printed in a handout.</p>
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Jesus made it clear: we bear fruit by

- ✓ leaving our places of comfort to make other disciples,

⁶ John 15:1-8.

⁷ Luke 3:8-9.

- ✓ baptizing others into the saving relationship with God,
- ✓ teaching new disciples how to live as disciples, and
- ✓ by remembering God's ever-present love and sacrifice.⁸

St. Paul made it clear: we bear fruit by embodying the characteristics of God himself--love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.⁹

Our words and our lives bear fruit for Christ as we live out our salvation in ways which others can witness and appreciate. It is for this privilege that we have been chosen by God.

Today, I can only plead with you to respond in word and deed to the honour God has done you with your commitment and love.

AMEN.

⁸ Matthew 28:18-20.

⁹ Galatians 5:22-23a.