

Advent II (RCL/A): "Show Me!"

Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

December 6-7, 2025

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

"Don't show me your roots, show me your fruits!" thunders John the Baptizer at the Pharisees and Sadducees in today's Gospel. In today's context, he might say, "Don't tell me you're a member of the DAR and that makes you a good citizen. Don't tell me your great-great-grandfather fought for the Union in the Civil War and that makes you a patriot. Don't tell me your relative laid the cornerstone of a very important church and that makes you a good Christian. Don't **tell** me anything – **show** me!" Just like Eliza Doolittle sings to her suitor Henry Eynsford-Hill in *My Fair Lady*:

Words! Words! Words!
I'm so sick of words!
I get words all day through;
First from him, now from you!
Is that all you blighters can do?
Don't talk of stars
burning above;
If you're in love,
Show me!
Tell me no dreams
filled with desire.
If you're on fire,
Show me!

John the Baptizer wasn't talking about romantic love when he preached and baptized in the desert. He was really talking about love of **God**, though he didn't put it that way. His message was: if you care about God, if you love God and care about pleasing God, then clean up your act. Don't natter on about it: just do it! Jesus' put it this way in Matthew 7:

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you who behave lawlessly.'"

The “lawless” part doesn’t mean you’re driving without a license, haven’t paid your taxes, parked illegally, or shoplifted. It means you’re ignoring what **God** says to do; you’re breaking **God’s** laws. What **are** some of God’s laws, commandments?? (Think: 10 Commandments!)

- **Do** put God above everything and everyone in your life; **don’t** worship false idols.
- **Do** treat the Lord’s name as precious, using it in prayer and praise. **Don’t** curse.
- **Do** honor the Lord’s Day, **do** worship, do be **a part of**, rather than being **apart from** your faith family; **don’t** neglect to worship, **don’t** forget to read Scripture,.
- **Do** honor your parents.
- Don’t kill.
- Don’t lie.
- Don’t steal.
- Don’t covet anything or anyone. (“Covet” means, don’t want anything so much you’ll break a commandment or break a law to get it.)

John was dead serious about doing everything God wanted. He knew God wanted him to tell the Jewish people that the Messiah, the Savior promised a thousand years earlier, was about to appear. So he was telling folks, “Get ready!” If we find out a special guest is coming to our house, most of us race around a bit, don’t we? Cleaning, getting rid of clutter, sprucing things up, putting our best foot forward. John is saying, “Clean up your act: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” (Matt. 3:3c) The bottom line is, the Lord’s not worried about the state of our house. He’s interested in the state of our **heart**. And it’s just as important now as it was 2,000 years ago, when John the Baptizer was preaching this stuff, that our hearts be cleansed of sin to let the Savior in....

The command John gives is, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is come near!*” (Matt. 3:2) Jesus is going to say the same thing (Matt. 4:17), letting the people know, “God is near, and you’ll **want** to be holy, being so close to all that holiness.” The Greek word that’s translated “repent” actually means, “Change your mind.” You figured it didn’t matter to take something that didn’t belong to you, or to cheat on a test or on a friend, as long as you didn’t get caught?

Think again. The Holy Spirit wants you to change **not just your mind** about that, but to change your **heart**, to have a change of heart, deciding that more than anything else you want to do what God wants, what God expects, because we love God, and we know that God loves us and knows what is Life-giving for us.

John told the people, there's a way you can show you're turning over a new leaf: get into this river and let me baptize you! It's a physical sign of a spiritual change of heart. It's a cleansing of the body that suggests a cleansing of the soul, 'kinda like Reese Cathleen and Brooks Frederick's baptisms tonight or Margot Marie's tomorrow. They'll be baptized with water, like John baptized the folks in the Jordan River. But we can also say they're baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire, like John predicted Jesus would baptize, because they are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, at Jesus' command. They mystically share in our Lord Jesus' death and resurrection through their baptism, as we do through ours. Martin Luther said, "Wash your face and remember your baptism!" Most of us wash our faces (or take a shower) every day, so that little ritual can become a daily reminder of the gift of our Baptism, a daily drowning, dying to sin and rising to new life, continuing throughout our lifetime and beyond. "Wash your face and remember your baptism!"

We show we love God by loving what God loves, including loving our neighbor. The part of tonight's Gospel that says, "*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*" (Matt. 3:10) makes it sound like some of our neighbors are going to end up as kindling. And the verse that says, "*His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire*" (Matt. 3:12) can sound like some of our neighbors are definitely headed for hell. What if, instead, we accepted

that there is both wheat and chaff (the inedible husk of the wheat), inside each of us?? What if Jesus doesn't **just** want us to come clean about our sins, humbly and sadly acknowledge our failures in love, but also wants to help us course-correct, "clean house" so to speak, of the jealousies, resentments, unkind thoughts, plans for come-uppance, hoped-for vengeance on our perceived enemies? What if the chaff on the threshing floor isn't my no-account neighbor, but the good-for-nothing clutter in my own heart? "Jesus, have at it! It's December, but I'm ready for some pre-Christmas 'spring' cleaning!"

The famous analyst Carl Jung said that the stuff we criticize in others is probably the stuff we can't stand in ourselves. We split it off from our conscious self-identity and project it onto others. The Russian dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn said something very similar:

"If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"¹

Our job probably isn't to point the finger at others like John the Baptizer did, but to examine our own hearts and actions, willing for the Holy Spirit to declutter, steam-clean, stain-remove our heart, preparing the way of the Lord into our souls, homes, communities and world. Amen

¹www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2025/12/2/theologians-almanac-for-week-of-december-7-2025.

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