**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**December 12th, 2021**

**A Home For All**

1. Where’s the Joy?

As we light the third candle of Advent this morning, the candle of joy, we hear the teachings

of John the Baptist. He is preparing the way for the Savior to come into this world, and his words sound sometimes more punitive then good. When I first read the text, my face contorted when he spoke loudly about this ‘brood of vipers!’ and I thought…well, that’s not very joyful, John. Yet, I believe that when you dig a little bit deeper, you find the joy that John points to as he carves out a path for all people out of the wilderness and into the light.

 What’s beautiful to see in John’s teachings is that we have different representatives from the land. We hear about folks who are ‘children of Abraham’ or have a long ancestorial tie to the Kingdom. We hear of soldiers, of tax collectors, of regular people with regular jobs all with the same question, “What shall we do?”

 John doesn’t mince words as he shares with them what they need to do – in fact, he offers very tangible advisement. For those with the ancestorial ties, he tells them that, in love – it doesn’t really matter. You can’t rest on your laurels and point to history – you need to be bearing good fruit or doing good in the here and now. For the tax collectors – don’t take more money than you should. For the soldiers – don’t extort wages, be comfortable with what you earn. For all people – if you have two coats, give one to the person without a coat. If you have more money than you need, give to those who are struggling.

 John’s work is preparation for the Savior to come, getting people to understand priorities in a different way and to seek repentance and a new way of living that more deeply reflects the heart of God.

1. What Shall I Do?

What is wonderful about this passage is that the message is tangible and understandable in

our modern day lives. When we ask each other this season, “what shall we do?” or “what shall we do to prepare for God to come among us?” the answers remain the same. Do good because you can – no matter your history. Don’t cheat one another, be kind to those in need and extend help, and do it all in the name of Christ.

 All of this work, this way of being or acting in the world, is what prepares us to accept the good news, the good news of God coming into our world and shaking up perceptions and reminding us that God’s love and reign looks different from the world’s priorities.

1. A Home for All

As we think about what John is sharing with us this morning, we again are reminded that the

message is for all people. As I look around the congregation, I think about the professions or passions that have led us in this life. We have many teachers among us, scientists, engineers, musicians, artists, parents, etc. and from those perspectives, you can all ask, ‘With what I have, with what I know, what shall I do to prepare for the Kingdom of God?’ It will be different for all of us, but the work of all is important to welcoming the Savior into the world.

 The Kingdom of God is one that welcomes call, that invites all to ask the question of preparation and it breaks down our human lines and boundaries of hierarchy and power. And so, in addition to John’s question, I also turn to this question this morning. If we believe that the Kingdom of God is a place where all people of all places experience hope, peace, joy, and love, how do we intentionally create a home for all who enter this sanctuary and enter our lives.

1. Complicated Relationships

One of the biggest challenges I see in our churches, not only in our Presbytery, but in the

national landscape, is that we have become a society that is more individualistic in nature and as the chaos of political and health crisis came to a breaking point, the church became one of our spaces in this world where conflict has brewed.

 For me, when I get down to the root of the question and I mean to the very crux, I have to ask myself – How do we do church with different voices and beliefs that are amplified in order to do the work of the Kingdom? It starts with knowing who I am, I know I’m politically liberal, I’m fiscally conservative, I believe in the inherent worth of all people, no matter their sexuality or nationality. I know who I am, and the beautiful part of being in Christian relationship with each of you is that – you don’t need to believe what I believe. And yes, that makes life hard – because we gravitate towards people who believe what we do, because it’s easy and it’s nice and in a world where anxieties can be high, it’s just comfortable to be around those with the same voice.

 But again, if we claim that this Kingdom of God is bigger than any of us can imagine, it means that different voices and different ways of life need to be honored and examined, continually asking that question – do my views reflect the God I know and love? If so, we are walking the journey that John is calling us to, with viewpoints and ways of being that prepare for the Savior of the World to come and dwell with us.

1. Holy Manners

A Home for All means that we need to engage in what I like to call ‘holy manners’ – it

means that even if we do not have the unity of same thought, we do have the unity of the Holy Spirit. In that, we love each other more, we pray for one another, we engage in conversations with grace and respect, and we hold the deep conviction that each of us is a child of God, born to be a dynamic part of building up God’s Kingdom here and now.

 So, reflecting on our text this morning, I have a few questions for you to really meditate on as we move into this third week of Advent. My first would be the question that people ask John – ‘What shall you do?’ Or, in other ways – what way should you live to prepare for our Savior to come among us? And my second question follows upon our theme today, that sense that we are called to create and craft a place for all – how will you seek to do that this season and into the coming year? How will you create, how will we together create spaces that point to the Kingdom of God growing and thriving in this world?

 May these questions attune your heart to the work of preparation, and may they bless you as we look with hope, peace, and now joy at the journey before us as we welcome our newborn Savior into our world and into our lives. Amen.