

**Sermon - A Wild Idea**  
**Shout for justice and sing for joy**  
**The United Churches of Olympia**  
**December 12, 2021**

**Luke 3:1-18**

The third Sunday of Advent is Joy yet the passage at first reading is harsh and judgy. Not much joy in John's words – sounds more like fire and brimstone and name calling. Yet verse 18 ends our reading declaring John a bearer of good news.

John challenged those in his day that looking for savior and he challenges us as we strive to experience God's moving in our world. First, we are invited to visit the wilderness this week. Wilderness places can be uncomfortable, uncertain, unpredictable. But in scripture they are the places where folx are lead or called to go to experience the Divine. You may not want to go camping this week, but I invite you to set an intention, to carve out some time to slow down, cancel your plans, and create space for the joy of the season to find you. Remember your baptism, remember the vows we made to the children of this church, to each other to prayer for, encourage, support and live in community with each other. And use this as the spark you need to act with joy and compassion toward others. Maybe you purchase a pig from the Presbyterian Giving Catalog, maybe you decide to purchase something this week for the Nickerson camp. Maybe you remember to say thank you to the workers checking you out. But find ways to share some of your abundance and joy with another this week.

John challenges us to change. People were going to John to be baptized and he speaks truth to power and calls them to repentance. John says we can't rest on our lineage or membership in the church. John says God doesn't need lazy kin\_dom builders.

John the Baptist's good news sounds harsh, but he preaches a home for all—where inequities are banished, valleys are lifted up, and all have the resources they need for collective flourishing. Ultimately, John's message is one of joy. Especially to those who are suffering and in need. For the privileged who came to be baptized, John offers the opportunity to open a new door, to change how we see the world, to better align ourselves with values of God as we prepare for the coming of Jesus. We are called to collectively build and repair the structures of our society; we are called to be kin-dom builders. Wherever we build, God is there. (SA, Close to Home)

We have heard today, about the importance of the microshelters this church has built, about how the propane, water, laundry services all meet physical needs but they also create hope, peace, joy and love in the world. God is most certainly present there on Wheeler, where our beloved brothers and sisters live in tents and microshelter, car and RV because there is no home for them.

John warns the people that a tree (or community) that does not live in such a way that its life illustrates its relationship with God—it might as well, metaphorically, be kindling for a bonfire (Luke 3:9). <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/third-sunday-of-advent-3/commentary-on-luke-37-18-5>

Our theme today is a home for all. In the most practical sense, we as people of faith must advocate and work towards a community where all are housed. My daughter Caroline is in her first semester of college and mid-way through she called us, homesick for the first time. She had gone over to a childhood friend's home for dinner and it reminded her of home, of how much she missed our house, any house, a familiar gathering place. Home for her is a place of safety and comfort. Everyone deserves such a place.

Spiritually, this church needs to be a spiritual home for all who pass through it. Where people are safe to question, to doubt, to wonder, to grow in their faith. The Black Lives Matter sign in our window and the rainbow flag and the cross itself should be beacons to our community that we are safe affirming inclusive house where they are welcome. Not to come in and assimilate but to become a part of the family, to be incorporated, to expand our understanding of ourselves and the Divine.

John the Baptist shouted for justice, shouted that systems must be torn down and to make room for something new. The way of Jesus goes against the imperial systems of the world. And we are called to not align with them but challenge and model the communal way of God.

Soon we will read the Christmas story and there will be no room in the inn for Mary and Joseph just as there are too many places in our society where there is no room. Our community are overpopulated, housing is too expensive and we are too blinded by privilege, greed and capitalism to provide safe and affordable housing for all.

Here is John's good news. The world is changing. And it starts with us. Nowhere in John's message is it ok to sit back and wait for God to come, for some pie in the sky heavenly existence. We are called to change – morally, spiritually, physically how we live in community with each other and those around us. This is hard work, but the result will be joy.

I once heard a pastor say the UCC saying, “no matter who you are, or where you are on life’s journey you are welcome here”. But then they added, “but you aren’t welcome to stay the same”. We are intended to see our faith as a journey, to change, grow and act accordingly.

The people asked John, what must we do? This Advent we are invited to come close to God, to come home this Christmas and Advent is the time of preparation, we are called to readying ourselves, our homes for the coming of the Christ-child.

**"Making the House Ready for the Lord," by Mary Oliver**

Dear Lord, I have swept and I have washed but  
still nothing is as shining as it should be  
for you. Under the sink, for example, is an  
uproar of mice — it is the season of their  
many children. What shall I do? And under the eaves  
and through the walls the squirrels  
have gnawed their ragged entrances — but it is the season  
when they need shelter, so what shall I do? And  
the raccoon limps into the kitchen and opens the cupboard  
while the dog snores, the cat hugs the pillow;  
what shall I do? Beautiful is the new snow falling  
in the yard and the fox who is staring boldly  
up the path, to the door. And still I believe you will  
come, Lord: you will, when I speak to the fox,  
the sparrow, the lost dog, the shivering sea-goose, know  
that really I am speaking to you whenever I say,  
as I do all morning and afternoon: Come in, Come in.

I’ll close with my weekly Moving update.

Have you heard of Marie Kondo? She’s a tidying-up expert, author and is featured on several Netflix shows. In the course of assisting families declutter their homes, she tells people to question everything, and ask yourself, does this spark joy?

We’re down to the nitty-gritty cleaning out the farm. I remembered this as I stood staring at junk left in the garage. I found a lot of things that did not spark joy for me. And as I tossed stuff on the heap at the dump, I was amazed at how much of my life I’m willing to throw away, how much stuff we accumulate that ultimately no longer sparks joy, no longer works for us, and can no longer be reduced or reused or recycled.

I know Marie Kondo focuses on material aspects of homelife. But what about our spirits?  
“What sparks joy in your spirit? And where are you willing to say Come In! to others, to  
creation, to the Divine?

My prayer is that this week there will sparks of Joy in your life that ignite in you new  
reasons to come close with curiosity and wonder to God this Christmas.

May it be so for each of us.

Amen.