

**December 12, 2021**

**Luke 3:1-18**

**A Home for All-Joy Sunday**

**Gathering Music-Close to Home (Barnaby Bright-mp4)**

### **Welcome**

Good morning! Welcome to Disciples Christian Church. I am Rev. Kelley Becker, the Senior Minister. Thank you for being here, whether you are worshiping in-person or online, your presence matters. I am grateful you have set aside this time to be together.

One of the ways in which we build community and support one another is by praying for each other. If you have prayer requests to share, and are here in-person, please fill out one of the prayer request cards, which are located on the table by the entrance to the sanctuary. Once you've filled it out, place it in the basket on the communion table. If you are worshiping online, please share your prayer requests in the comments of this broadcast or by private messaging the DCC FB page. We don't want to miss the opportunity to share your burdens or your joy.

Every week, we gather to celebrate that darkness cannot extinguish light, and to remember that love will always be more powerful than fear.

We gather to be reminded of what it means to be called people of God. Let us bring in the Light.

(a deacon will light candles)

These candles symbolize God's presence and steadfast love in our homes, in our lives, and in our world. They remind us that the light of God's love is not confined to a church building, it is everywhere.

Will you pray with me?

Holy One,

if you are our home,

then your word is the streetlight guiding us there.

So we want you to know—

We are walking your way,

and we are looking for a light.

And our feet are tired—we've lost our way a time or two.

And our bags are heavy—we're carrying an array of grief and fear on our backs.  
But we're on our way.  
We're looking for your light. We're listening for your word.  
When you see us coming, when you feel our hearts move,  
we hope you'll run down the driveway and greet us.  
Leave the light on. We are on our way home.  
Amen.

**Prelude O Come, O Come Emmanuel,  
arranged by Emily Lund, with Becca Waller, flute**

Today is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent—it is JOY Sunday. At first glance, our text today, the story of John the Baptist's call for repentance, which began, "You brood of vipers," does not seem like a text one would choose to talk about JOY. Our silly sweaters might seem a little out of tune with today's reading. But this is one of those passages that we need to look at and ask ourselves, "For whom would John the Baptist's words be good news and who would hear them as very bad news? And whose side do we want to be on?"

**Call to Worship**

A voice calls out in the wilderness.  
It sings of a home for all.  
It speaks of justice and peace.  
We could choose to ignore it.  
We could drown out that song.  
We could choose not to listen.  
Instead, we come into this space.  
We let the world grow quiet.  
We listen.  
A voice calls out in the wilderness.  
Do you hear it?  
We hear it. In listening, we worship.  
Let us draw near to God.

**Hymns- Good Christian Friends, Rejoice! - CH 164, v. 2**  
**Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn - CH 138, v. 1-3**

**Advent Candle Lighting-The Hubbard Family**

Joy is seeing people you love after months apart.  
Joy is hearing, "Come on over, it has been too long!"  
Joy is the stretches and giggles of a newborn child.  
Joy is making it home when the journey is long.  
Joy is your dog wagging his tail to meet you at the door.  
Joy is the energy of a new season.  
Joy is feeling found when you thought you were lost.  
So today we light the candle of joy because the welcome God has for us is nothing short of joyful.  
Rest in that good news. Take it in.  
Dear ones, we are close to home. Amen.

**Hymn-As We Light the Candle v. 3**

**Prayer**

We have come to a time of community prayer. As I mentioned before, if you are worshipping online, you are invited to share, in the comments of this broadcast, your prayer requests. We would love to celebrate what is bringing you joy and pray with you this week about your concerns. Let us pray together.

**Prayer Song- Joyful is the Dark - CH 333, v. 3**

**Pastoral Prayer**

God of open doors and porch lights,  
of welcome mats and candles in the window—  
we cannot thank you enough for your open-door policy.  
You are forever welcoming us home.  
In a world that puts handrails on park benches so that the ones without a roof over their heads cannot lay down, you offer something radically different.  
You welcome all of us, just as we are; just where we are.  
You paint a picture of a world that could be and you hold it up for us to see.  
You remind us that there is enough love to go around, and that neighbor helping neighbor is who we are called to be.

Thank you for the voice in the wilderness that calls to us.

Thank you for radical welcome and unchanging love.

Today, we express extra gratitude for the people and places that are home to us, but we also pray for all the ones without a home.

We pray for immigrants and refugees navigating the waters of trauma, change, and loss. We pray for the ones who experience homelessness and for the ones scraping together every coin to pay last month's rent. We pray for your children who do not feel at home in their body—assigned a gender or an identity that does not fit their spirit. We pray for all who do not feel at home in your church—wounded by strict rules and excluded by judgmental assumptions. We pray for the ones who long to build a home with a partner, but instead find themselves eating another meal alone.

There are so many who need a home, so help us be builders of that new day. Give us the courage of John, who saw a way forward so clearly. Turn our words into action and our conviction into change.

You are a God of open doors and welcome home celebrations.

Teach us to be the same. Amen.

## **Children's Time**

### **Hymn: Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord (Godspell)**

### **Sermon and Scripture**

There is a website, which I may have told you about before, called, "Stories of Joy." I go to it every once in a while, when I need a pick me up. One of the stories I read this week was titled, "Bipartisan Brew." The title interested me, as I envisioned members of Congress, from both sides of the aisle, sitting in front of a fire, drinking coffee and making plans to do big things for the American people in the coming year. That vision turned out to be off, but the story brought me joy anyway. It was originally told by Barbara Sprunt of NPR.

It turns out there are some folks in Congress who have been inspired to work together. They worked together brewing beer for the Anheuser-Busch 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Brew Across America. Five Congressional teams were part of the competition where lawmakers worked with breweries in their home states to create a new craft beer. Each team must consist of a Democrat and a Republican. The judges were a panel of Washington D.C. journalists. I listened to the interview of some of

the brewers and I heard them joking and laughing together. Rep. Tony Cárdenas, D-Calif., competed with his partner Rep. Fred Upton, R-Michigan and they won with their version of a Mexican lager. The pair got a trophy which, of course, they plan to share. As I read this story, I realized I wasn't used to reading political news with a smile on my face and joy in my heart.

The "About" page of the "Stories of Joy" website from which that story came says simply, "Stories of Joy comes to you from Desert Cross. We are a faith community meeting in Gilbert & Tempe, Arizona. Our hope is to bring you stories of people serving and caring for each other. Stories of Joy!" This description was helpful to me this week as I was thinking about today's text, for JOY week, that does not come across as particularly joyful. John the Baptist's words are harsh, but he uses them to inspire the crowd coming to be baptized to build the kind of a world in which everyone feels truly at home. What if JOY that work and the fruit of that work are the source of JOY?

This is Luke 3:1-18:

3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene,<sup>2</sup> during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, son of Zechariah in the wilderness.<sup>3</sup> He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,<sup>4</sup> as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.

<sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled,  
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,  
and the crooked shall be made straight,  
and the rough ways made smooth;

<sup>6</sup> and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

<sup>7</sup> John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.”

<sup>10</sup> And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” <sup>11</sup> In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” <sup>12</sup> Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” <sup>13</sup> He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” <sup>14</sup> 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.”

<sup>15</sup> As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, <sup>16</sup> John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

<sup>18</sup> So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

I hope you recall that we were introduced to John last week. His parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, miraculously became parents when they were both well past the age in which people generally become parents. Last week, our story ended with John in his father’s arms on the day of circumcision. Zechariah blessed his son saying, “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;

for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

<sup>77</sup> to give knowledge of salvation to his people

by the forgiveness of their sins.

<sup>78</sup> By the tender mercy of our God,

the dawn from on high will break upon us,

<sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

In this week’s text John is grown up, living into his father’s prophecy about his life. He was, indeed, preparing the way for Jesus and yes, oddly, he led with “You brood of vipers.” To be clear, the people he was talking to in the author of Luke’s story, had come to John to be baptized. Presumably, they were a friendly audience. You would think he could soften some of that language for the ones

who had heard his message and taken it to heart. His intensity makes it really hard for us as the readers to zero in on JOY.

John's message is, in fact, good news, although there would have been some people, for whom this news would have felt very bad. John's message was a message of change, forgiveness, and justice for people who were suffering. God called John for a specific place and time. His cry from the wilderness, paralleling the words of Isaiah, proclaimed righted wrongs, rough patches in life smoothed, and salvation in a very physical sense, for all people. This was and is a message of joy, of good news, for the ones who have lost hope in their lives ever being better and for the ones who have been hurt by inequities and injustices, the ones who have suffered under the systems that benefit their oppressors.

A lot of people came to be baptized that day and John didn't just dunk them and send them merrily on their way. He charged them with "bearing the fruit of repentance." He told them that just because they were Abraham's ancestors they didn't get preferential treatment. God was and is for everyone. And with baptism there is a call...a call to turn from the ways of brokenness and destruction and toward the ways of healing and love. John strongly suggested that these newly baptized folk let their actions reveal that they understood what God's kin-dom was really about. Stop accumulating stuff. Share what you have. Refuse to be indifferent. Show compassion. Don't take advantage of others. Be content with what you have.

In his speech, John specifically addressed tax collectors and soldiers, the ones who worked for the Empire. Surprisingly, he didn't tell them they had to quit their jobs, he told them they couldn't extort people or hurt them. So, for people of faith, even if we work for entities that benefit from oppressive systems or seem to always be on the wrong side of justice, now that we know better, it is our responsibility to do better. We are to use our circle of influence to be builders of the kin-dom, to make this world a home for everyone. Each one of us, wherever we work, wherever we live, in all stages of life, is called to do our part to make the world a more welcoming place to live.

In the Gospel of Luke, the author over and over again shows us that the halls of power, places like palaces and wealthy banquet halls, are not where the real action takes place. The action that matters takes place in stables, dusty towns,

fields full of sheep---and in the wilderness. It is ordinary people, not the wealthy rulers (or CEOs and politicians) who receive the good news. And good news it is for the ones who have no coat, the ones who have been cheated out of their wages or beaten by soldiers. It is good news because the kin-dom of God is an upside-down place, a place where everyone has what they need, where they are safe and loved and where they feel like they belong, like they are home. But this news is only good if we believe it can become the reality. We have to believe that someday we won't have to seek out a website called "Stories of Joy," to find joy. We have to believe that one day, the world will be overflowing with JOY...it will be everywhere.

I know John's message sounds like a lot of "get it together, people," and "sort yourselves out." The whole "brood of vipers" thing is a lot. I mean, when I have my way, when we sing Amazing Grace, we don't sing "saved a wretch like me," we sing "saved a soul like me." I think words matter and I don't think we ought to address anyone, including ourselves, in negative ways. I don't think God sees us as wretches or even as a brood of vipers, even at our worst. But the root of John's harsh, pointed message is truly a message of joy which was and is: If we truly turn from self-centeredness, fear of scarcity, indifference, and exclusion, the world would be a very different place. Peace would prevail. Hope would be restored. Everyone would have enough. And we would all know what it feels like to belong. We would recognize home all around us. And a world like that would scream JOY! That's what we are called to build.

That is why we help our children welcome these friends to the stable. It's a little bit silly, but it is a great way to talk to them about everyone having a place in God's kin-dom. It is a way for all of us to begin to imagine a world in which our actions reflect the truth: Everyone belongs....Democrats, Republicans, gay, straight, trans, Black, brown, doubters and questioners, babies and grown-ups of all ages. The kin-dom of God is truly a home for all. Take a picture of this scene...share this on social media. And then live like you believe it, dear ones. I promise, it will bring you joy. Amen.

**Hymn: For Everyone Born (lyrics on screen)**

## **Communion**

At Disciples Christian Church, communion is open to everyone, whether we are worshiping in person or virtually. You don't have to pretend you believe things you aren't sure about or be a member of the church. No matter who you are, what you have said or done, if you seek to love and be loved, you are welcome at this table where every week we remember the story of the last night Jesus spent with his friends. That night, they gathered around a table for a meal.

All these years later, we gather around this table to get a glimpse of that moment. For when we do, we remember that God welcomes all of us and there is a place set for every one of us. At the table, Jesus took the bread, blessed it, and broke it. He gave some to all of them and there was enough for everyone. He took the cup, blessed it, and passed it around, and again, there was enough for everyone. Let us pray.

(Elder prays)

**Communion Music:** Infant Holy, Infant Lowly CH #163

## **Building the Community**

Wisdom Elder Light Tours @ 6 pm, 12/16

Eldercare Baskets Sat., 12/18

Longest Night 12/21 @ 7pm

Christmas Eve 12/24 @ 5pm

Love in a Pantry-Bring Gloves and hats

Your generosity makes a difference in Bartlesville and beyond.

Please don't forget to give to the church by either going to the church by going to the website ([www.dccbville.org](http://www.dccbville.org)) and clicking "Give" on the homepage, dropping a check in the mail, or if you are worshiping here in person, you can drop a check in the offering box. Thank you for trusting us with your gifts.

**Hymn:** CH 167 Go Tell it on the Mountain –chorus twice

## **Benediction**