

Second Sunday in Advent – December 6, 2015

Text: Luke 3:1-14

Theme: "What Shall We Do?"

Too little too late. Ever hear that expression? Ever use it? About this time of the semester, a great many students are hearing it. Also, some people who are looking forward to retirement at the end of this month may be hearing it from their financial planners. I used to be a person who always waited until the last minute to handle everything and I was usually pretty good and pulling it off with the all night study session, banging the sermon out at the last hour, scraping together a year's worth of tax payments on April 14th at 11:59 p.m. I've changed with age and wisdom and now I prefer to plan as much as possible. I know that not all my plans will come to fruition but at least if I fail, I do not fail from a lack of planning. The hardest part of planning was just doing it. We so easily get into a routine of just letting life deal all the cards and we are forced to play the hand we're dealt. What stops us from proactively attacking life? I think that often, we have a fear of failure. But if we are doing that which God calls us to do, we cannot fail. Perhaps the problem is that we want to live our lives in opposition to God's word and still have success. That is a hard path for a Christian.

First of all, we can never fail if we never try. Many people are the constant victims of life. But St. Paul is very clear. We are not just conquerors. We are MORE than conquerors through him who loves us. If you are a victim, it is only because you choose to be so. If you are a victim, it is very likely because you are living your life outside of the

boundaries of God's Commandments and then expecting everything to fall into place anyway. Look at all the question John the Baptist was getting when he announced that judgement day was coming and all the people who did not have a relationship with Christ would be cut down and thrown into the fire. "What shall we do?" Oh sure. Now you care. Never mind that you have been abusing God's grace your whole life. Now that I warn you that you're about to go to Hell, all of a sudden you want to know what to do. On the night before the Spanish final, it's a little late to be leaning what adios means but you can probably say hola to a F. Too little, too late folks! You've made your bed, now sleep in it! That's what I would say, but that is not what our Lord says. Through John, he immediately told them what to do.

"And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise....Collect no more than you are authorized to do....Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

What was John's point? Start living your life as a child of God. This is the exact same answer God gave through Malachi 400 years earlier to people similar to us. They were people who had known God their whole lives and yet they were not living lives that were consistent with being a children of God. When things were not going right for them, they asked the same question. What shall we do? Me? If I were God, I'd say, "Too

little too late you bunch of heathen.” But you can all be thankful that I’m not God, because God says,

“Return to me, and I will return to you.” Do you want to insure that you will spend eternity in heaven? Then return to God. That’s just another way of saying, repent! Turn around! Stop willfully sinning. It’s not that you will earn salvation by living a pure life. Salvation was already given to you at your Baptism and faith was created in you to grasp that gift of salvation but faith is a living thing. It is damaged by sin and strengthened by Word and Sacrament, like your body is strengthened with proper nutrition and exercise.

Now I know that I am preaching to the choir. Obviously all of you know that your faith is fed and nourished by being here and that is what empowers you to repent, to turn away from sin and follow Christ. But that truth is sure easy to forget. It is so easy to grow complacent. We just take the faith God created in us for granted. When that happens, our works start to suffer. We make convincing arguments to ourselves that giving 2% of our income to God is faithful enough. Or that living with someone to whom we are not married is ok because everyone does it. Or that using God’s name as an expletive isn’t all that bad, I mean you’re only personally offending the creator of the universe and redeemer of your soul. It is so easy to justify any behavior in which we wish to participate and slowly, inch by inch, that pulls us away from God and we find ourselves walking away from him.

STOP! Stop doing whatever you're doing that is inconsistent with being God's child. REPENT! That is turn around. He makes it so easy for us. Just stop and he will be right there to welcome you back just like the father of the prodigal son, just like the shepherd searching for his lost sheep, just like Jesus welcomed Peter back into the family with the words, "feed my sheep."

What did that mean to Peter? Feed my sheep. Do what I called you to do. Serve me in the way I have gifted you to serve me. Use the gifts I have given you to proclaim my love for all people. Stop sinning. Repent. Follow me. It is never too late because our Lord is loving and patient with us.

Feed your faith like you are doing here today with God's word and sacrament and exercise it daily by living your life according to God's command. If you do that, faith will remain strong and you need never fear any sin. If you don't do that, eventually faith may die and then you will cease to care about God, much in the same way a failing student didn't care about the subject in which he was failing until the last day of the semester and then it was too little, too late. There is nothing that can be done. We cannot create faith. We can only keep it alive and strong. Do that during this Advent season as we prepare for our Lord's return.