

## THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT - B

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Sometimes it feels like the world is simply turned upside down, doesn't it. And in order for us to straighten it out, we sometimes have to change ourselves and our perceptions. A Sunday school teacher in reported this conversation about how her perceptions differed from her students in her class one day. She told her students, "If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church, would that get me into Heaven?" she asked the children in her Sunday school class. "No!" the children all answered. "If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into Heaven?" Again, the answer was, "No!" "Well then, If I was kind to animals, gave candy to all the children, and loved my neighbor, would that get me into Heaven?" she asked them again. Again, they all answered, "No!" "Well," she continued, "then how I can get into Heaven?" A five-year-old boy shouted out, "You gotta be dead!"

We've been sticking to our theme all throughout this advent season. In the first week, the scriptures simply called us to "take the time to make the time" for the coming of the Lord each and every day of our lives because we never really know when he's going to pop up. During the second week, we were reminded to take the time to repent as a good way to prepare. But now we arrive in the third week of advent that just seems turned upside down. We're not lighting purple candles anymore – it's a pink one instead. The Scriptures are filled with images of captives being freed and the rich being sent empty away. As we move into this third topsy-turvy week of Advent, might the Scriptures be challenging us to take the time to embrace transformation and a change of attitude!

In our first reading, Isaiah reminds his community to take the time to look for transformation in the most unlikely places. The people of Israel are struggling to make ends meet. Their economy has collapsed from the onslaught of various foreign invaders, and there really is no hope. He tells his followers that although the world seems upside down, it's simply our perception. From God's point of view, changes in social order should be seen as signs of transformation. He reminds Israel that God is not punishing them by turning the world on its head. Rather, he is offering them the possibility of renewal, justice, and peace even in the most unlikely situations.

Paul is conscious that his community needs to take the time to change in the second reading today. We hear the apostle pray that the God of peace will make us perfect, holy, and blameless at the coming of the Lord. And despite their fidelity to the Gospel thus far, the church of Thessalonica realized that the only way to prepare for the Lord was by taking the time to embrace change and transformation after they were forgiven of their sinfulness.

Today's Gospel begins with the voice of change – John the Baptist. Visibly, John's message was a proclamation for continued change. Look at his dress – he wore camel's hair and feasted on locusts and honey. But listen to his message in the Gospel. Get rid of the greed that makes other poor. In other words, CHANGE! Get rid of the selfishness that turns your concerns to yourself. In other words, CHANGE! Make the crooked paths straight. In other words, his message was similar to what we heard last weekend. After we seek repentance, we simply take the time to CHANGE those things that keep us from preparing the way of the Lord.

We know that we need to take the time to prepare for his coming. We know that we need to take the time to repent. But after we've received his forgiveness, we simply need to change. And a good place to start is with our attitudes. Our faith reminds us that we are people of action who don't have to be enslaved by our perceptions. There's a far better way to live. Are you willing to change your attitudes, or are you afraid to have your world turned upside down?

What are some ways that we can begin to change? Over the next weeks, we'll see hundreds of people enter our church for the first time since Easter. Let's take the time to change our attitudes. Instead of criticizing or judging their actions, let's turn our worlds upside down by being the most welcoming community that we can be. When someone who is less fortunate comes up to us and asks for some help, instead of being skeptical and immediately recognizing their motivations as a "scam," let's take the time to change our perceptions and help them overcome their situation by lending a helping hand.

Advent is a good time to search our hearts and to take the time to transform our lives. How are you going to take the time to transform your attitudes as you prepare for his coming?