

Faith in the Home
Sunday in Advent, Matthew 3:1-12, "Stirring Up Peace."

The theme of the Second Sunday of Advent is peace. And yet, every congregation that follows the three-year lectionary of the Bible will hear John the Baptist call those coming to him, "A brood of vipers!" In Matthew, the vipers being called out are specifically the Pharisees and the Sadducees. This certainly seems like a paradox to a message of peace.

However, this was no accident because these religious leaders were not leading by example. They were in danger of being damned and damning those following them. They loved their status, their comforts, their wealth, and their influence. Even under Roman occupation they were not without these things. Worst of all they believed they were righteous. If I had a time machine I would love to go back and see the look on their faces as John the Baptist called out these high and mighty self-righteous hypocrites. But what would he say to me....(note my own self-righteousness in the previous sentence.)

We are all guilty of being self-righteous at times. We all have someone we can look down upon from our own pulpits. Like those hearing John, we need to be called out as well. We need to be stirred up and reminded that God judges more righteously than we do because He is good, and He is the only one who can truly see what is going on. John the Baptist was preparing them for Jesus by helping them see their need for Him. God's Word showcases who we really are. As we see ourselves for what we are there is often sorrow, disgust, shame, and fear. We want to do better on our own, but we can't.

Standing before God in this state is scary. But then we see who God is through Jesus! When we see Jesus, we see God incarnate as a man. We see that while God does not love the things we have done, we see His patience, His mercy, His grace, and His Love. Our sorrow, disgust, shame, and fear are turned to hope, joy, relief, assurance and peace, because Jesus paid for our sins.

The peace He brings is between ourselves and God. Jesus brings us something better than we can imagine or describe. In Jesus we see God's true loving, merciful nature towards us. We no longer have to fear death because we are assured eternal life. Jesus paid for sins and shortcomings on the cross so that when our resurrected savior returns, we will see the fullness of the eternal life He has promised us. "Thank you Jesus, and stir up our hearts O God, that we may have peace!"

So how do we teach these things to our kids...

1. My son Jeremy had a very good question a week ago. One of his newest and closest friends lives in our neighborhood down our street. His friend is not a Christian because his parents are not religious at all. Upon finding out that his friend does not believe in Jesus, Jeremy asked if his friend is a bad person. Amy and I said, "no." The reason being is that we all sin and fall short of God (so truly his friend is not any worse than I am). Jeremy then asked, "Will my friend go to Heaven if he dies?" My answer was, "This is why we love people even when they do not know Jesus, and when the time is right you can share about Jesus with your friend." Yes, God makes us holy and righteous by faith. But our kids need spiritual milk, not meat.

2. When we read and hear this passage, along with the other accounts of John the Baptist from the Gospels, we must remember that they first apply us as believers before they apply to the world. John was preaching to people who were supposed to be living faithfully as believers. Claiming to be righteous before God without listening to Jesus is what enlists us amongst the "brood of vipers." In the words of Jesus, "Take the plank out your own eye before you worry about the speck in your brother's eye."

3. When we teach our children about the aspects of our faith that our current culture hates, we must convey to our children that we are standing up for the truth of God out of love for the lost, not to be "better" than them. Sometimes this will cost us some relationships and it will hurt. But as Jesus said, "Blessed are you when others hate you on account of me." We are the light of the world. The children of the darkness will not always want us to shine Christ's light.

4. A good way to teach children about what repentance looks like is by watching the movie the "A Muppets Christmas Carol." It is not as dark or scary as other versions, but it is faithful to Charles Dickens' classic, and Michael Caine as Ebenezer Scrooge acts as if he is not amongst a bunch of puppets. When Scrooge is faced with death and condemnation, he is given hope in seeing a better way. This is what John the Baptist was trying to instill. This is what the Gospel of Jesus is about. Jesus is the Way the Truth and the Life. There is no hope without

Him, and there is endless joy with Him.