

EBENZER SCROOGE AND BAPTISM WITH FIRE

(Matthew 3: 1-12)

Intro: In the sixth grade.

- We were given an assignment.
 - #To write a poem.
- My poem was inspired by:
 - #Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol."
- It went like this:
 - #Ebenezer Scrooge was a tightwad true,
The stingiest man you ever knew.
His money he hoarded,
And the place where he boarded
Had the lowest rent in town,
About a half o' crown.

But then came a day
When old Scrooge changed his way.
He'd foreseen his sad fate,
And if Bob Cratchet now came late,
Scrooge wouldn't pay no mind
For the new Scrooge was oh, so kind.

I don't think my poetry will make anyone forget:

- Robert Burns.
- e.e. cummings.
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge.
- Maya Angelou.
 - #Any time soon.

But my sixth-grade poem came to mind.

- About five weeks ago.
 - #When we were in Branson.
 - *At Silver Dollar City.
 - #We were sitting in the Opera House.
 - *Watching a production of "A Christmas Carol."
 - +Ghost of Christmas Past.
 - +Ghost of Christmas Present.
 - +Ghost of Christmas Future.
 - =All make an appearance.
 - Rousing Scrooge from his night's sleep.
 - Rousing Scrooge from his selfish, skinflint ways.

- As Scrooge's life was transformed on the stage.
 - #From stingy.
 - +To self-less.
 - #From greedy.
 - +To generous.
- I had one of those "aha" moments.
 - #One of those occasions.
 - +When I saw something new.
 - +When I saw something I hadn't seen before.
- I said to myself:
 - # "Aha!"
 - # "Now that is repentance."

I. Our Gospel Lesson For Today Is A Call To Repentance.

A. That Call Comes Through The Voice Of John The Baptizer.

1. Jesus himself is going to proclaim that exact same message.
 - a. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."
 - b. Matthew 4:17.
2. But here it is John the Baptizer who issues the call.
 - a. John was not your straight-laced, button-down preacher.
 - He wore camels hair with a leather belt.
 - #Attire associated with the prophet Elijah.
 - *2 Kings 1:8.
 - +Whose return was to signal the "Day of the Lord."
 - =Malachi 4:5.
 - #John was a hippy before there were hippies.
 - #John was:
 - *Ghost of Christmas Past.
 - *Ghost of Christmas Present.
 - *Ghost of Christmas Future.
 - +All rolled into one.
 - He ate locust and wild honey.
 - #Not exactly a vegetarian.
 - #Not exactly a health food nut.
 - *What else does one eat in the wilderness?
 - +Where there were no McDavid's.
 - +Where there was no Taco Tov.

- b. John's voice was heard in the wilderness.
 - Not in the Temple.
 - Not in the synagogues.
 - Not on the street corners.
 - #But in the wilderness.
 - *In Hebrew.
 - +Word for "wilderness" (medbar).
 - +Related to the word for "word" (davar).
 - *Wilderness is the place where there is no word.
 - But John was in the wilderness.
 - #Connection Matthew makes to Isaiah 40: 3.
 - *"A voice cries out:
 - + 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
 - + 'Make straight in the desert a highway for our God'."
 - *God's word of promised deliverance.
 - +For the people of Israel exiled in Babylon.
 - =Their days of punishment are over.
 - For disobedience and unbelief.
 - =They're going to go home.
 - =They're not going home through the Fertile Crescent.
 - Up the Tigris-Euphrates river valleys.
 - Down the Mediterranean coast.
 - =They're taking the short-cut home.
 - Through the desert.
 - Through the wilderness.
 - #John was in the wilderness.
 - *Baptizing.
 - *Proclaiming the reign of God.
 - *Calling people to repentance.
 - #People had to make an effort.
 - *To go into the wilderness.
 - *To listen to John.
- c. John had not graduated from the Jordan Valley School of Charm.
 - He was not the kind of guy you would want:
 - #Chairing your hospitality committee.
 - #Serving as a Sunday morning greeter.
 - #Maybe not even as your pastor.
 - When the Pharisees and Sadducees.
 - #Went into the wilderness.
 - *To check out John's baptism.
 - *To be baptized by him.
 - #John let them have it:
 - *"You brood of vipers!"
 - *"Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

- Can you imagine one of our Sunday greeters?
 - #Welcoming, if you can call it that:
 - *Newcomers.
 - *Members with infrequent worship attendance.
 - #"Why, you BOVs (Brood of Vipers)!"
 - #"What are you doing here today?"
 - #"You haven't been here since Easter."
 - #"What makes you think you can come any time you want?"
 - #"You people need to repent."

B. Ebenezer Scrooge Knew About Repentance.

1. Repentance is more than saying:
 - a. "I'm sorry."
 - b. "I messed up."
 - c. "Forgive me."
 - That is confession.
 - #Confession has its place.
2. Hebrew word for repentance (shoov) literally means:
 - a. Turn.
 - b. Turn around.
 - c. Return.
 - d. Do a 180°.
 - Stop going in the direction you were going.
 - Instead, go in the direction God wants you to go.
3. Greek word for repentance (metanoia) literally means:
 - a. Have a change of mind.
 - b. We might say:
 - Have a change of heart.
4. Ebenezer Scrooge.
 - a. Didn't simply apologize.
 - b. He had a change of heart.
 - c. He turned his life around.
 - d. He repented.

C. What Needs Repenting Of In Our Lives?

1. Each of us can come up with our own list.
 - a. Selfishness.
 - b. Laziness.
 - c. Greediness.
 - d. Eating too much.
 - e. Exercising too little.
 - f. Gossiping.
 - g. Criticizing.
 - h. Fault finding.

2. Repentance.
 - a. Not simply a matter of resolving:
 - “I can do better.”
 - b. Rather a matter of admitting:
 - “I can’t do any better.”
 - #At least not:
 - *By myself.
 - *Through my own effort.
3. We need more than John’s baptism of repentance.

II. We Need Jesus’ Baptism With The Holy Spirit And Fire.

A. Fire Can Be Destructive.

1. On Friday morning.
 - a. I was in the office downstairs.
 - Working on my homily for this morning.
 - b. Florist came to deliver our altar flowers.
 - He came upstairs and put the flowers in the refrigerator.
 - When he went down the stairs and out the door.
 - #He discovered his delivery truck was on fire.
 - c. Mary called 911.
 - d. I ran out to move my car.
 - Which was parked next to his burning truck.
 - e. By the time the fire department arrived.
 - Parking lot was a blanket of smoke.
 - That truck was a total loss.
 - f. Florist called a tow truck.
 - To remove the remains.
2. If that is what Jesus’ baptism with fire is all about.
 - a. Aren’t we all going to be toast?
 - b. Do we really think?
 - We are the wheat?
 - #Headed for the granary.
 - Those others (who don’t repent) are the chaff?
 - #Destined for unquenchable fire.
 - Maybe that’s how we should read this text.
 - #But I would like to suggest an alternate reading.

B. Jesus’ Baptism With Holy Spirit And Fire Is A Good Thing.

1. Martin Luther used the phrase:
 - a. Simul iustus et peccator.
 - b. We are at the same time saint and sinner.
 - c. We are at the same time wheat and chaff.

2. What happens when we are baptized?
 - a. Part of us dies.
 - b. We are joined to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus.
-Romans 6:5.
 - c. "We have been buried with him by baptism into death,
so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead
by the glory of the Father,
so we too might walk in newness of life."
-Romans 6:4.
 - d. We have been buried with Christ.
 - e. We have been drowned with Christ.
 - f. We have had our chaff burned.
 - g. We have been given the gift (not simply a demand) of repentance.
3. With the beginning of Advent.
 - a. We've made a change in our liturgy.
 - b. Confession and Forgiveness.
 - Replaced by Thanksgiving for Baptism.
 - #This is an option provided for:
 - * In Evangelical Lutheran Worship.
 - I'm sorry I wasn't here last week.
 - #To explain this change.
 - We'll use Thanksgiving for Baptism.
 - #Advent.
 - #Christmas.
 - #Epiphany.
 - We'll go back to Confession and Forgiveness.
 - #Lent.
 - c. Thanksgiving for Baptism.
 - Doesn't mean:
 - #Our sin goes unconfessed and unforgiven.
 - Just the opposite.
 - #Our baptism is a daily reminder.
 - *Who we are.
 - *Whose we are.
 - +Children of God.
 - *Kingdom of heaven has come near.
 - +We live under the rule of:
 - =Our crucified and resurrected King.
 - *We die to sin.
 - +Our chaff is burned every day.
 - *Every day we are given the gift of:
 - +New life.
 - +Repentance.

Concl: Ebenezer Scrooge and Baptism with Fire.
-These are good things.
-They are blessings to celebrate.
 #In Advent.
 #Every day of the year.
-We celebrate God's gift of repentance.

