

Just Get On With It!

Zephaniah 3^{14-end}; Psalm 146^{4-end}; Philippians 4⁴⁻⁷; Luke 3⁷⁻¹⁸

What then should we do? [Luke 3¹⁰]

John the Baptist must have had a lot of patience!

You cannot think that his message is unclear (perhaps unlike the report published on religion in society this week, where, because of the spin on the reporting, the Church of England seemed to apologise for its existence!).

Calling your listeners **a brood of vipers** may not be in the textbooks as a way to influence people positively, yet it works for John.

Yet John was aware that he was *in fashion* and so he played up to it.

His hearers **were full of expectation** and they want to know what they should do - and they then do what has been done for generations: they avoided doing anything serious by asking questions. (As a teacher, there was always a student who, having been given instructions, tried to put off the moment of doing some work by sticking their hand in the air and saying, 'I don't understand!')

The way this is written it almost sounds like Luke is being ironic in calling his proclamation, **Good News!**

The call wasn't just to **repent**, but it was to look forward to the coming of Jesus - **the one who was more powerful - who will separate the wheat from the chaff.**

The repentance that he was looking for was practical - the Psalm tells us that:

- * **The Lord ... gives justice to those who suffer wrong and bread to those who hunger**
- * **The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down.**
- * **The Lord watches over the stranger in the land.**
- * **The Lord upholds the orphan and the widow.**

But the effect of repentance, of changing our lives, is that we take on those responsibilities!

Paul lets us know the things that Christians need to get on with:

- * **Rejoice!** But we can't rejoice if those around us are in need and we have done nothing about it.
- * **Pray!** But what sort of prayers would we have if those who have need don't inhabit our prayers?

The Prophet Zephaniah announced that theme years before:

- * He certainly says the things that we want to hear - **The Lord your God is in your midst and gives you victory** and goes on to say **I will remove disaster from you so that you will not bear reproach for it.** Which is exactly the sort of thing that the people of faith look to God to do!
- * But that same God **will save the lame and gather the outcast** and goes on to say **I will change their shame into praise.**

People of faith, against the test of Matthew 25, have to be the people that just get on with getting involved with the lives of people that God wants us to look after.

When we do this then and only then we can share that **peace which passes all understanding!**

Let me tell you about Peter. Peter was an alcoholic who lived in Abney Park Cemetery in Stone Newington. He called at the Church house every day for a cup of tea and a sandwich (one of more than a dozen that called every day). Over the months his story came out and he told me about his past and how he had been in love, but the person he was in love with felt God's call to train to be a Salvation Army officer. The rules said that she could only marry another Salvation Army officer and so the relationship ended, and this was the beginning of his decline. I traced this officer and she remembered Peter and came to London to wait for Peter at his regular time. They spent hours together and she persuaded him to go into rehab. She went home and Peter and I drove round every centre in London and they were all full. I had to let him out again at the gates of Abney Park cemetery where a friend met him with a can of Special Brew. God knows that I tried, but I failed him. Peter didn't survive the next winter. Could I, should I have done more?

Repentance that leads to faith will save us, but unless it makes us better, caring people, it won't make us good people, God's people!

What then should we do? You know what you can do
- so in God's name, just get on with it!