

“The Rainbow People”

Luke 3:7-18

From the food section of our Plain Dealer . . .

Grocery stores are reorganizing their entrances so the first thing you see is a softly lit area with hardwood floors and produce bins full of colorful polished apples, gleaming purple eggplants, leafy green cabbages, mounds of white onions, and golden honeydew melons. Large barrels overflowing with a variety of nuts, beans, granola and trail mix tempt you from the perimeter and channel you through the aisles.

But does the rainbow of choices matter if when we leave the store, we can't get along with one another?

John the Baptist has a lot to say about what we as followers of Jesus Christ are offering to a consumer-oriented world in which the customers are getting increasingly bored, picky, disinterested and even irritated. “Bear fruits worthy of repentance,” he thunders in verse 8. He's telling us that the produce department is suffering. Time to produce better fruit.

This is what we want to look at. How can we choose produce that is *worthy* . . . worthy of repentance, worthy of a life-style change, and worthy of our attention?

Grocers might tell you that it's all about locally sourced fresh foods. Shoppers might be concerned with sustainability issues or impressed by the latest organic trend.

But John the Baptist takes us in other directions. We can almost see him shaking a bony finger in our face, saying, “Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’” (v. 8). He tells his Jewish compatriots that they can no longer slough off ethical and moral responsibility by falling back on their “chosen people” identity.

Being an observant Jew who attends synagogue, prays in public, gives alms or even someone like the young rich fellow who told Jesus that he had kept all the commandments since his youth means nearly as much as producing produce that is fresh, delicious and attractive.

In other words, the desert prophet tells us that you can't expect to flaunt a brand and get away with it, unless your actions back up your words.

To their credit, the people listening to John seem to take him seriously. Notice what they ask: "And the crowds asked him, 'What then should we do?'" (v. 10). In other words, "How can we show people we care?"

John has a ready answer. *Share to care*. "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise" (v. 11). Authentic Christian living begins with sharing.

Jesus shared. Sharing is the whole point of Christmas, isn't it? God shared Jesus with the world. Jesus' life and ministry were marked by acts of sharing and service. He fed the hungry (Matthew 14:13-21), healed the sick (Matthew 8:16), and spent time with the marginalized (Luke 19:1-10).

The early church shared. The first Christians promoted sharing. The disciples appointed deacons to make sure their widows were not neglected when food was distributed (see Acts 6:1-7). Many of them went so far as to divest themselves of private property and put the funds into escrow to help those in need: "Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. ... There was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:32, 34).

Sharing was a hallmark, defining characteristic of the early church. “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44-45). No wonder that they earned “the goodwill of all the people” (Acts 2:47).

Sharing is a biblical mandate. And finally, you can’t read the Bible without noticing the emphasis on sharing. We are ordered to share! God seems to know that some of us are tighter than a fiddle string, The writer of Hebrews tells us: “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (13:16). The apostle Paul advises Timothy, his protégé, to “command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share” (1 Timothy 6:18). These are just a few examples; there are plenty more.

A good story about sharing is entitled, “The Rainbow People” . . .

In a beautiful meadow at the bottom of a great mountain lived a people called the “Greens”. They wore green clothes, lived in green houses, drove green cars and believed that God was green.

At the top of the great mountain were another people, the “Blues”. They wore blue clothes, lived in blue houses, drove blue cars and believed that God was blue.

Greens and Blues didn’t speak to each other. In fact, they hated each other. Green parents would teach their children to say: “Green is happy, Blue is sad; Greens are good, Blues are bad.”

Blue parents would teach their children to say, “Blue is happy, Green is bad; Blue are good, Greens are bad.”

Blues and Greens grew up seeing each other as “sad” and “bad”. But they didn’t really know each other. Some Blues went a whole lifetime without even talking to a Green. They didn’t know each other because they stayed in their own territories. They didn’t go to the same churches or schools.

It happened one day that a Green boy was walking with his father when he saw a Blue boy flying his kite in their meadow. When the Blue boy saw them he became frightened. He ran back toward his mountain. But in doing so he sprained his ankle and couldn’t walk very well. The Green boy wanted to help him, but his father said, “No”.

“Don’t you remember what your mother and I taught you? Green is happy, Blue is sad. Greens are good, Blues are bad”.

The Green boy still asked his dad if he could help the Blue, “Dad, how do we know this Blue is bad? All I know is that he has a sprained ankle, and he needs someone to help him walk home.”

When the Green boy said this, his father turned to him saying, “Blue is the color of the devil. God only loves Green. Our religion teaches us to help our own kind. I want you to do as you are told”.

A few weeks later the Green boy was out playing with his pet rabbit. He chased it through the tall grass and into the open fields. He played for so long that without knowing it, he had crossed into Blue Land. He was about to catch the rabbit when the rascal jumped down a small cliff. Green went after him and in so doing caught his right leg between two big rocks. He pushed and pulled, but could not move. He called for help, hoping a Green would hear him.

He worried that sooner or later a Blue would come by. This thought frightened him because he had never met a Blue.

As the sunlight faded, someone approached the trapped Green boy. It was a Blue. It was the same boy who had been flying his kite in Green land. The Green boy closed his eyes waiting to be hurt by his enemy.

The Blue boy stood by the Green boy for a few minutes. Then he went to a tree and broke off a branch. The Green boy said, “Don’t hit me with that branch,” thinking that’s what Blue was about to do.

Blue answered him, “I’m not going to hit you. The branch is to pry loose the rocks that are holding your leg.”

Blue pried loose the rocks. He tore his blue shirt into long strips and tied the branch to Green’s leg. Then he helped Green walk home.

When Green’s father saw his son’s leg tied with the blue cloth, he cursed his boy. “I don’t care if you were injured.” He screamed. “You should have not let a Blue help you.”

Though Green knew his father was upset with him, he could not forget the Blue who had helped him. When his leg healed, he went into Blue Land to find his helper.

For a whole day Green walked in the neighborhood of Blue Land. It took a lot of courage to do this because everywhere he went people slammed doors on him and called him names. Some young children even threw rocks at him. Finally, he found the boy who had helped him. He did not slam his door on Green. He welcomed him into his home.

Green was happy to see Blue, but he was surprised to see that his helper had clothes that combined the colors of blue and green.

“I thought you learned that green was bad. Why are you wearing green with your blue?” asked Green.

“Do you remember when I helped you when you were hurt? I tore up my blue shirt to make a splint for your leg. I figured that you became part of me, and I became a part of you. In helping you and talking with you, I came to see that green is as good as blue.”

“Won’t the other Blues throw rocks at you when they find out you’re a ‘Green-lover’?” asked Green.

“I don’t care what people think,” said Blue. “It is right to help people whether they are blue or green.”

The two boys became close friends. They often visited each other. They made up a new song which they taught to the children. It had these words:

“Green is good, but so is Blue,
Purple, Yellow and Red too –
All the children should be glad;
There is no color that is bad.”

Little by little more Blues and Greens started visiting each other. Then they began going to each other’s schools and churches. They even went beyond their own lands and visited the Yellows, Reds, and Purples. After a while, most people didn’t call themselves “Greens” or “Blues” but simply “Rainbow People”. And to this day their children sing, “There is no color that is bad”.

Jesus shared. The early church shared. Sharing is a Biblical mandate. Share to care.

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent. We lit the candle of Joy. We receive the gift of joy during these last 10 days until Christmas when we share to care, when we are the Rainbow People.

May the peace of God . . .

#267 – Joy to the World