

John the Baptist is preaching repentance in the wilderness. We cannot help but wonder what brought the people out of the town into the wilderness. It is not likely they wanted to be punished by God! John offered a way forward in the baptism of repentance to live in another way.

Would we go if we thought we could be set free from our overanxious minds and restless sleep? Would we go if we thought that that the nudge of guilt that wraps around us at Christmas that the world is in still in the midst of a Pandemic and there are millions of people who would like their first vaccine while I have an appointment for my booster would lift? Would we go if we thought our children could live in a safer world without inequities of food, housing, and health care?

Would we go if we thought I could help trees to grow where bulldozers raze the earth?

The questions raised this third Sunday of Advent are about how we can prepare our hearts for living another way, a different more compassionate Way with God's people, all of God's people. Luke wants us to know that John lived in a world dominated by Rome and its power. The poor were hungry and cold. Soldiers often took what they wanted from farmers, travelers, and merchants; they even demanded labor from an unsuspecting strong individual to carry the soldier's provisions. For the Jews, Rome and its leaders were oppressors of the poor and those without power.

What kind of world do we live in? And again, why would we go out for a baptism or repentance to prepare our hearts for the birth of a child who will walk the way of God—even into Jerusalem itself.



Can you find John and even Jesus in this picture from the 17th century? John is in a brown robe and points to Jesus who approaches in light blue. The desperate people face John. They want something and he points toward Jesus.

What kind of crowd would we paint/imagine?

Preaching of Saint John, the Baptist, Pieter Bruegel, 1564-1638

The lectionary text from Philippians begins "Rejoice!" and our Rose-colored Advent candle takes its joyous color from the awareness that we are growing closer to the coming of the Light into the world. Are we ready? No. Yet our longing and our hope create expectation—which we may have to realize is not be the anxiety we are naming as the emotion in ourselves. This transformation is doable John tells us, perhaps not easy, but doable. Repentance is about a different perspective, a better perspective *for the whole world*. Metanoia, change, brings New Life.

How do we do this? Or in the words of John the Baptist in Luke, we do things we can do. We pay attention. We pray. One act can tip the balance of the system and create systemic change. If you have two coats, John the Baptist says, give one away to someone who needs it. Do not extort from those who work for you; there is another way to live.

This prayerful paying attention to our spirit and the ways we fool ourselves can be practiced with an Examen, an Ignatian reflection prayer form offered to us all.

Pastor Susan

Examen is a way to reflect peacefully on your relationship with God in the middle or end of the day.

Centering. Come to a place of stillness and peace and recognize God's presence with you. Ask for assistance to see yourself and your experiences as God sees.

Gratitude. Recall the gifts you have been given and be thankful.

Review. Recall the events of the day (or the period to be reflected on), noticing especially experiences that bring up strong emotions, whether positive or negative.

Sorrow. Consider any moments of regret or when you fell short. Ask forgiveness for any wrongs done.

Share, Trey Everett, 2018

Response. In light of your reflections, ask for grace for tomorrow and the future.

Loyola Marymount University, Examen

Perhaps, at this moment in time you are paying more attention to how you are gratefully moving in God's creation.

Ecological Examen by: Joseph Carver, SJ

All creation reflects the beauty and blessing of God's image. Where was I most aware of this today?

Can I identify and pinpoint how I made a conscious effort to care for God's creation during this day?

What challenges or joys do I experience as I recall my care for creation?

How can I repair breaks in my relationship with creation, in my unspoken sense of superiority?

As I imagine tomorrow, I ask for the grace to see the Incarnate Christ in the dynamic interconnections of all Creation.

Conclude with the prayer of Jesus:

The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

