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## *What Should We Do? Questions from A Brood of Vipers*

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon Ashley Carr  
The Third Sunday of Advent, Year C**

Grace and peace to you in the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Greetings, you brood of vipers! I have learned many things this week about the Cathedral of St. Philip, perhaps most notably among them is that our Curate, Salmoon, has a wicked sense of humor—assigning a preaching slot to the brand-new canon with this Gospel text.

Nevertheless, onward we will go.

You all remember five years ago in April of 2019 when the Cathedral of Notre Dame was engulfed by a blazing and brutal fire. Last Saturday, after nearly 900 million dollars of renovations and painstakingly precise restoration, the cathedral reopened. With great pomp and circumstance, major players on the world stage, and faithful believers gathered to ceremoniously restore to life this grand and beautiful symbol of our mortal connection to God. If you haven't had a chance to watch the coverage, I commend it to you. It was marvelous, hopeful, and a sign of possibility when so much feels impossible. In that place, even through the television screen, one cannot help but to lift up one's eyes to the Glory of God's possibility—encouraging us, shepherding us, strengthening us, redeeming us.

During NBC's coverage of the event, they interviewed various experts in faith, architecture, and French culture. Among the interviewees was Bishop Robert Barron, a sort of internet sensation Catholic Bishop, however oxymoronic that sounds. Barron gave tours of Notre Dame during one season of his life and speaks with great knowledge and personal affection for the space. He drew the viewers' attention to the North Rose Window as being one the most moving pieces of stained glass in all of Notre Dame. Crafted in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it is the only rose window in the cathedral to retain its original glass. There are 88 panels in the wheel all centered around the image of Mary enthroned and holding the Christ Child. As Barron describes it, the window symbolizes a well-ordered soul. A life built around the miracle of Christ.

There I sat watching this glorious reopening unfold while mulling over this fun text from Luke's gospel. This is a text rife with John the Baptist's wild exhortations, one that leaves little room for us to hide from the concept of repentance which we'd just as soon put off until Lent, wouldn't we? We're supposed to be decorating trees, wrapping presents, and anticipating the joy of Christmas, not reveling in our sinfulness. But that is the great challenge of Advent, we're not there yet so we are drawn to sit here in the reality of John's call to repentance. That is, after all, how we prepare our hearts to be settled and wide open for the coming of the Christ Child in only 9 more sleeps from today.

As we anticipate, as we prepare our hearts, we might have the same question that that crowd before John had three times over, what should we do? We know that we are to prepare, that we are to be faithful, that we are to say our prayers, yes of course all of that. But what really should we be doing? A question that I found myself asking George on Monday morning, but also that I ask God regularly in my prayers. What should I do? What do you have for me? How can I best order my life, my soul?

For John the Baptist, the answer was clear, give from your abundance, take care of others, prioritize honesty and truth. He took the crowds out of themselves and into the needs of God's creation all around them. Take care of each other, tell the truth, share. In essence, John implores us to live lives that act out of love, and with mercy pursue justice at all costs. George was less clear.

What should we do?

Act out of love, and with mercy pursue justice at all costs.

But how?

It is far too easy to get lost in the wilds of this world. We are busy. The people in our lives have 24/7 access to us, there are opportunities aplenty that can snatch up our time, we have dreams to chase, chores to do, and lists upon lists upon lists. You might leave here on Sunday mornings filled to the brim with the love of God, feeling as if you are yourself aflame with the baptism of fire and the Holy Spirit. But the next thing you know, the week has gone by and you're back again having leap frogged over the what should we do piece.

Some years ago, I remember being here at the Cathedral of St. Philip for an ordination or confirmation or something and thinking, oh how lucky are those who work in this building that they can come into this space and soak up the glory and grandeur of God. When the workday feels mundane, they can close their computers, leave their phones behind, and come into this space to be filled up again with the clear sense of God's presence and purpose. It was Thursday before I found myself in here, and only because we had a liturgy walk through.

But when I came in, the room was filled with the Chenaults' beautiful organ playing, the morning light, finally emerging from behind a week's worth of clouds, was trickling softly through the stained glass, my eyes lifted up, and sure as the ceiling is tall, there I felt the presence of God. In all of the depictions of Christ, of faithful believers, of the ones who paved the way, I was reminded of my own what and how. When our eyes fix on Jesus, when we hold the glory of God at the center of our world, the rest orders itself, and orders it well. When we fix our gaze on the whole thing of it, the gift that our Maker has given us in Jesus, then we will know exactly how to put one foot in front of the other and do that which God calls us to do.

You see, actually, repentance is right for this season. Repentance isn't about drowning the woes of our sinfulness. Repentance is about recognizing the ways that we want to order our lives around our adoration for God. It's about being obedient to the will and teachings of God. It about glorifying what has God has done in Jesus, in us, in the beauty and grandeur of creation. If we prioritize God at the center of our entire being, then our lives will be well ordered according to God's will. Repentance will be a little less daunting. It will be natural. It will feel good and right to get good and right with God.

Each of us finds all kinds of ways to remind ourselves of Christ at the center. For me, this week, it was this space. For Bishop Barron it is the North Rose Window. You may find it in the joy of a child in December, or in a creek, or on a run, wherever. The presence of God is not confined to any building or any anything. Those reminders are all around us, dwelling in every nook and cranny, and sometimes staring us right in the face.

What should we do?

How should we do it?

You will have to sort out the answers to those questions yourselves. That's between you and God. But the what and the how, the well ordering of our souls, that will come when you fix your eyes on Christ the most miraculous work of our God at the center of it all.

Amen.