

The Advent Conspiracy
Conspiring to Change Our Relationships
Matthew 3:1-12

- I. Remember ... we're in the middle of a conspiracy.
 - a. It's a conspiracy to reclaim Christmas.
 - i. To bring it back to it's essence.
 - ii. To turn away from frauds and imitations toward the true Spirit of Christmas.
 - b. This is not a battle (US vs. THEM) to grab back our holiday.
 - i. I'm afraid the truth is far more sinister.
 - ii. No one took our holiday, we gave it away.
 - c. Somewhere along the line we, the church, lost our focus.
 - i. There was no one to call us back to a holy Advent.
 - ii. And the voices that were there – were drowned out and ignored.
- II. So, the conspiracy is really focused on us and what we can do to get ourselves where we need to be.
 - a. To find our way back to a more sincere celebration of the season.
 - b. Hence, the conspiracy.
 - i. Worship.
 - ii. Relational Giving.
 - iii. "Resisting the Empire."
 - iv. Sharing God's Bounty.
 - c. Last week we talked just a bit about committing ourselves to worship.
 - i. Today, we take up the next piece of that.
 - ii. Relational Giving.
- III. Let's begin – Matthew 3:1-12
 - a. John comes with one purpose – prepare people for the coming of the Messiah.
 - i. He has a specific message and a specific (short) time to get it out.
 - ii. He has to stay on point – so his preaching is blunt, straightforward and plain.
 - b. It's also hard to hear – who picked this Scripture for Advent?
 - i. It doesn't sound like a typical "get ready for Christmas" passage.
 - ii. It has too many teeth.
 - c. This is what John says ...
 - i. Repent.
 - ii. Produce fruit worthy of repentance.
 - iii. A time of judgment is coming.
 - iv. Oh ... and by the way – Merry Christmas.
- IV. Let's look closer.
 - a. Repentance.
 - i. Preparing for Christ's coming involves a sincere look at your life.
 - ii. A turning from yourself toward God.
 - b. Fruit.
 - i. Worthy of repentance – what kind of fruit is that?
 - ii. John gives us a hint.
 1. It involves a better relationship with God.
 2. It involves a better relationship with others.
 - a. Parallel passage (Luke 3:7-14)
 - b. Share what you have with others.
 - c. Don't cheat each other – be honest.
 - i. Tax collectors.

- ii. Can they even be righteous?
 - d. Don't abuse your authority.
 - i. Soldiers.
 - ii. Poor pay – supplement income.
 - iii. Gentile soldiers – repentance?
 - iii. How does God want us to prepare for Jesus' coming?
- V. God wants wholeness and justice for relationships.
 - a. Relationships are important to God.
 - i. Creation – God in relationships.
 - ii. Adam/Eve – God understands the value of relationships.
 - iii. Marriage – God endorses relationships.
 - b. God wants relationships to be strong.
 - i. Cain/Abel.
 - 1. "Am I my brothers keeper?"
 - 2. YES.
 - ii. Strong relationships have to be a priority.
 - c. If you call yourself a Christ-follower (an apprentice) – relationships have to be solid.
 - i. Matthew 22:37-40: Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'"
 - ii. Loving God – Loving others are inseparable.
 - 1. You can't love God and not love your neighbor.
 - 2. You can't truly love your neighbor if you don't love God.
 - d. Relationships matter.
 - i. As followers of Christ our relationships should be excellent.
 - ii. That is not to say – perfect or conflict free.
 - 1. People are people.
 - 2. Conflict happens.
 - a. Personal – thoughtless; hurtful; neglectful.
 - b. We take our relationships for granted.
 - i. They need nurturing.
 - ii. They need attention.
- VI. As we think about relationships and relational giving ...
 - a. "I'm afraid I hate the weeks just before Christmas, and so much of the (very commercialized and vulgarized) fuss has nothing to do with the Nativity at all. I wish we didn't live in a world where buying and selling things (especially selling) seems to have become almost more important than either producing or using them."
 - b. We have to work toward connecting with one another in real and meaningful ways.
 - c. 2 ways ... giving gifts that reflect the relationship and giving the gift of relationship.
 - i. Reflect the relationship.
 - ii. The gift of relationship.
 - d. Reflect the relationship.
 - i. Fruit cake.
 - ii. Re-gifting.
 - iii. Song; letter; dinner; time; etc.
 - e. Gift of relationship
 - i. Repair.
 - ii. Reach out.
 - iii. Re-Connect.

- f. Our songs, our movies, our Christmas cards all hint at it.
 - i. The desire to belong, to be important, to matter.
 - ii. The need to connect with someone.
 - iii. The acknowledgement that relationships are really the most important thing.
- VII. The God we worship is calling us to conspire together to change our relationships.
 - a. To give in a way that reflects our connection to one another.
 - b. To give in a way that heals and restores relationships.
 - c. To have this Christmas make a difference not just because of what we give, but who & how we give.