

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

December 7, 2025



WINNOW

sorting out what is worth keeping

by Drew Downs

I struggle with a common affliction. One we might call: “We Might Need That”. It is a disease often inherited, but it can be situational. We can find the evidence in boxes of cables in the garage or the junk drawer that is stuffed with batteries, manuals, and hex wrenches from Ikea projects. It can also be art supplies, yarn, or old pans. Those things we keep moving out of the way so we can get to the things we’ll actually use. But we never get rid of them.

The kind of winnowing John the Baptist describes the Messiah doing is not like this at all. We might call it decisive, but I think the better articulation is unattached. Unattached to the “could be” and convicted to support what is: about our lives, our loves, our justice.

When we struggle to throw away old cables, we’re preparing for a hypothetical future. God’s focus is on what we are actually doing with our lives — and our neighbors.

ADVENT

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WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Hope and Peace

Christians have marked the passage of time through this season of Advent by lighting candles in a wreath. It serves as a means of being present to this season of anticipation.

In my house, like many others, the Thanksgiving weekend is the time when we turn to the next season. Which I continuously struggle to remind others is Advent and not Christmas. This is an annual tradition. As is calling me Scrooge. And my "losing" the "debate."

Regardless, the holiday weekend serves as a distinct turning point. And we turn our own attention in a new direction. Often to shopping lists and end-of-year obligations. But also to the moment, to the people, to nostalgia, to the future.

The first two candles, representing the first two weeks of Advent, are often described as symbolizing Hope and Peace respectively. And for those following the lectionary, we are invited to see everything through a gospel lens. That this is Good News. That we can hope in the transformation of the world, to the coming justice we long for. And we can believe in the power of peace, as people called to make peace.

In this season of lengthening nights, we are reminded that the light is coming. That this is the point of our hope and the need for peace. That this is the work we do in every age, including the present.

With love,
Drew+

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FOR SUNDAY

Advent 2A

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Collect

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.'"

Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every

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tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

"I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Reflection

For those of us who have grown up in the church, it is easy to treat the Pharisees and Sadducees as the antagonists of the story. So whenever they show up, we already know to hate them, right? It's like Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast* — we boo him when he comes on screen. But that isn't here yet. That isn't the point. Nor, dare I say, their role to play. Especially here.

Even so, why does John call them "Brood of Vipers"? And why does he ask who warned them to flee? Does it even matter, since warning is what John seems to be doing? It feels like he's rejecting people who could be on Team Messiah! I doubt it is, though.

There is a gap between the learned and the masses; a chasm that can only be bridged by radical transparency or widespread literacy: developments which would come many centuries later. And this seems to be part of the frustration. It is as if John is leading a worker's movement and corporate CEOs and Wall Street traders are showing up to join in. It isn't about the inclusiveness of the movement so much as the nature of it — and how unlikely it is that these people are all that interested in joining it. Precisely because the message isn't directed at them. It is for the people that they are actively taking advantage of. It is natural for John to assume there's an angle.

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