WHAT THEN SHALL WE DO?
September 29, 2019 --Luke 3: 4-17
The Church of the Covenant

WHAT THEN SHALL WE DO? This begins an ongoing sermon series throughout this fall related to key questions posed to Jesus’ disciples and world. John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, has begun his ministry and is preaching repentance and the crowds assemble and He begins His sermon—“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Luke 3: 7) Not exactly the power of positive thinking kind of preaching, is it? So in that same vein I begin my sermon today...

I hate my spoon. My spoon causes me to gain weight. I had lost a lot of weight and then have put it right back on. My spoon is the cause. I shove ice cream into my face at 10:00 p.m. and wonder why I have regained all that weight. I have decided it is the spoon. The spoon CAUSES ME to gain weight. But, you know, if I threw out that spoon there are still others in my utensil drawer. And if I threw out all of those spoons, perhaps then I would use forks, and if I threw out all my forks I suppose I could then use a butter knife to eat my ice cream. Its not just the spoon that causes me to gain weight, it is the whole utensil drawer. What then shall I do???

The best story of “passing the buck” and blaming something in the Bible is the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden being tempted by the serpent. (Genesis 3: 1-7) So Adam and Eve, tempted by evil and the devil as they were, eat of the fruit of the one tree the Lord has commanded them not to eat of and God, of course, discovers this. BUSTED! So Adam says to God, “(the woman) gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” (v. 12) I’m not responsible; my wife is! Isn’t the last time a husband will endeavor to blame their wife for something! But Eve says: “The serpent beguiled me, and I ate.” (v. 13) The devil made me do it! Not the last time someone will blame the evil one for their sin. Now bear with me because I now go off on a flight of fancy and share with you something that is not in scripture. So the serpent, an oily and slippery liar, says: “It was the apple’s fault. God, if you hadn’t created the apple and put it on this tree none of this would have happened!” It’s the apple’s fault. Not me; I’m not the source of every heinous evil on the face of this earth. God, by creating that apple, YOU are responsible! Not the only time someone will blame God for human instrumentalities. What then shall we do?

Hardly a week goes by where some armed shooter doesn’t shoot up a school or a workplace or a church. This is evil, pure and unabatedated. Where does this sort of evil come from? It comes from a society and culture that has turned its back on the One, True and Living God. The more we turn our back on God and exclude Him, the more these events occur. The higher and higher goes the percentage of people when asked do they believe in any sort of religion, mark their survey NONE, its now at 27% of the American population (By contrast 11% mark Mainline Christianity as their religion today), there are more and more incidences of violence breaking out in our culture. Am I the only person who has figured this out? Who sees the correlation? Turn your back on God and He goes away; when God our protector goes away, acts of incredible evil and violence accelerate. There it is; there’s the Truth with a capital “T”.

Now I’m about to make TWO statements that will manage to offend everyone in the room. The first – Maybe it isn’t a good idea to arm a populace that is more and more led and directed by the evil one. That’s offended more than half of you, and certainly every hunter in the room. But the second statement is —stop blaming an inanimate object for the inbreaking of pure evil into our society and culture. Don’t blame the spoon or the apple. Place the blame where the blame should be on the fall of mankind, on unabated evil when we remove God increasingly from our society, on pure and
unadulterated evil poured out through the hearts of people unchecked by the love and goodness of God. Any solution apart from God will fail. Because the solution is always about the Lord. Only God is the great amender of the human heart. What then shall we do?

The class on Violence in the Old Testament by Dr. Jerome Creach is very helpful. The first week he led us through parts of the Old Testament with the conclusion that God is not the source of violence, but we are. He took us through the fall of humankind in the Garden of Eden, where sin and depravity and all manner of evil entered the world through the temptation of the evil one and humanity’s willful obedience to the one described in scripture as the destroyer, the thief who comes to steal, kill and destroy, the liar and the Father of lies, the accuser, the lord of the flies, translated beelzebub, of death itself. Where does violence come from? Where does evil emerge? Where does the impulse come from to take a gun and shoot innocent people? From people listening to the tempter and not to God. What is the very next story in the Bible after the Adam and Eve’s sin and the fall of humankind? It is the story of Cain and Abel. So out of jealousy Cain rises up and kills his brother, Abel. Most commentators say with a stone. Let’s blame the stone. No. The Lord says to Cain: “Where is your brother, Abel?” (Genesis 4: 9) full well knowing the evil in the heart of Cain, and where it came from, and that murder was the result. God says to Cain: “The voice of your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground!” (v. 11) Violence comes from the sin of humankind. The evil of murder comes from a heart far away from God. It is clear from the scripture that this evil of death and murder comes from the evil one by way of a fallen sinful humanity. What then shall we do? What then shall we do? What then shall we do???????????

John the Baptist says: “Bear fruits that befit repentance.” (Luke 3: 8). The Apostle Peter preached a sermon like that of John the Baptist. When the people gathered cried out, “Brethren, what shall we do?” On that first Pentecost Peter preached in reply: “Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2: 38) Repent. Turn back from the world. Turn toward God. Come back to the Lord; live your life for Him. Be obedient to His Word and listen not to the evil murmurings of the great tempter. But I’m not a bad person; I’m not like those “other people”; I’m not the cause of all this evil breaking out in our society and world right now... This is interesting. John the Baptist when he says to bear fruit worthy of repentance asks his hearers to repent of those things in their own life for which they need to repent. Repentance, you might say, begins with me; begins with our own home; begins with our own church. John the Baptist says, If you’re a tax collector and you’ve defrauded people, repent and give the money back. Don’t be worrying about someone “out there” whose sins you consider far more egregious than your own. No. Do what you can. Get right with God yourself, first. Turn. Do what we can do. Know that the solutions for our society and world are not the solutions of man, but is the solution of God.

What then shall we do? What we should do we MUST do, in Jesus’ name. Amen and Amen.

By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!