



Ravensworth

BAPTIST CHURCH

December 15, 2024 | Third Sunday of Advent

Luke 3:7-16 | *Words for the Beginning: Do What Is Yours to Do*

Rev. Dr. Leah Grundset Davis, preaching

As we've moved through this Advent season, and you've engaged online, and with the devotional, and seen the artwork on the bulletins and elsewhere, you might have noticed a theme: quilts. I was as surprised as you when A *Sanctified Art* shared that quilts would be the main image for Advent. Kari shared in emails and on social media about how each week of Advent is represented by a different quilting square—hope, peace, joy, and love stitched into the week's layered meanings.

Coming from a long line of quilters who passed on none of those skills to me, I was intrigued by this imagery for the season of Advent, one of expectation and deep longing, of preparation and time traveling.

Of this imagery, the creators write, "we were inspired by the visual concept of quilting because this series feels like a blanket wrapped around you, providing warmth and comfort as you begin again. Like a quilt formed by scraps of old fabrics and meaningful family items, this worship series stitches together the ancient scriptures and reminders we need to hear again and again. The medium of quilting is an ancient craft (dated as far back as 3400 BCE), but it is seeing a modern day resurgence.

Quilts have been used for physical protection, comfort, ceremonies, abolition, family heirlooms, advocacy, and more. Quilting is a medium that transcends countless cultures, regions, and time periods, but is a craft rooted in community and storytelling.”¹

The storytelling of quilts has been passed from generation to generation empowering those who craft the quilt and those who receive it. The quilts always tell a story, whether in the quilt itself or from the creator to the receiver. On December 29, in our online only worship service, we’ll hear from many among us who have crafted and received quilts that tell the story of family, hopes, and history.

In 2021, Dr. Carolyn Mazloomi, founder of the African-American Quilt Guild of Los Angeles and Women of Color Quilters Network created an installation at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati. This installation, one of her most powerful, was entitled, “We are the Story: A Visual Response to Racism.”

As reported in the local media, “The exhibition is courtesy of the Women of Color Quilters Network, and focuses on issues such as the history of civil rights, racism in America and police brutality through a series of 54 quilts that were created in response to the murder of George Floyd from artists around the world.

Mazloomi said, “After George Floyd was murdered, I felt I had to do something to call attention to police brutality and racism in the country, and I thought, ‘Well, why not start at ground zero where George Floyd was murdered?’ I’m on the board of the Textile Center in Minneapolis, and I asked the director if he could help find other institutions that would take exhibitions,” Mazloomi said. From those initial questions and connection, the exhibit was born.

¹ A Sanctified Art, Branding Story, Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman.

These detailed, colorful quilts tell narrative stories through images, words, and phrases, reflecting on people, events, and places. She said each quilt is a “history lesson,” and “it’s our hope that the quilts will inspire a conversation about racism in hopes of finding some reconciliation. That’s the main purpose, to start a conversation.”²

In several interviews, Mazloomi said at the time, she was overwhelmed by the pain of the murder of George Floyd in 2020 and the systemic racism in the United States. The grief and the pain made it difficult to see any hope, any way forward. But, Quilts, always a source of social commentary from the beginning, were her focus as she sought to bring people together for difficult conversations. She felt overwhelmed by the vastness of the injustice in the world, but she also felt she could best speak by pulling together this exhibit, and it was hers to do. Because of that exhibit, community conversations happened where people created quilt squares together, had conversations over meals, discussed racial justice, and shared their own stories. Mazloomi believes her small part led to a bigger movement, but that each person had a part to play. Those discussions strengthened the local community, and the creation of a quilt together, now told the story of the people of that place at that time.

We tell our stories through textiles, artwork, written word, drama, and in our bodies. The stories from quilts, conversations, and sacred texts inform every bit of who we are in the world. That sacred text for us today is from Luke 3. We are really embracing the full meaning of Advent today—it’s apocalyptic, revealing, anticipatory, rawness. And we do it in the best way possible: with John the Baptist as our guide.

In Luke 3, Jesus has already been born and is an adult, although we have little information about any of that. His cousin John, the one loved by his parents

² Ginny McCabe, [“Fitton Center Aids new Powerful Quilt Exhibit,”](#) 2021.

Elizabeth and Zechariah, lives a radical life in the wilderness—eating locusts and wild honey. His message was one of repentance and justice saying from the wilderness of Judea:

*“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” ’*

I don’t know how John the Baptist would have displayed that message on a quilt, but as he quoted the prophet Isaiah, you have to wonder if the camel hair clothing, and leather belt bore witness to the prophets before them and shared the message loud and clear.

John the Baptist was likely overwhelmed at times by the systemic issues of the day. At least, I imagine he was. As he made his way to the Jordan River and heard from each person who came to him for baptism, I’m certain he heard of their pain, their sorrow, their hunger, and their joy. He knew they hoped because hope was what they did. And he knew there was another way coming, another way promised by God, the way that his dad, Zechariah sang about. The people were overwhelmed too.

In his very non-pastoral, but prophetic way, John the Baptist called his beloved baptismal candidates a brood of vipers and told them they had to repent from their current ways that hurt one another. You cannot only believe your salvation, your healing has been passed down to you and there’s nothing for you to do to live justly in community as you follow God. Sure, those in line for baptism, you might be a descendant of Abraham, but Abraham’s

call was to go and be a blessing, so that was theirs too. Ok, I said that a lot nicer than John the Baptist, but you get the idea.

Following John's fiery message, a natural question arose from the line of dripping wet people as they asked, "Well then, what should we do?"

Isn't this our question any time something new or overwhelming comes our way? When we feel completely unequipped to handle the enormity of the world's pain, or the grief, or sometimes even the joy?

As Kayla Craig writes, "This week's scripture calls us to a profound yet simple truth: "I can't do it all, but I can do something that matters." When approached by various community members—each grappling with their role in a society marked by inequality and injustice—John the Baptist gives practical advice that speaks across centuries.

To the crowds, says, "Share what you have."

To the tax collectors, "Take no more than your due."

To the soldiers, "Do no harm in pursuit of personal gain."

Each instruction differs, yet the core message is the same: Do the good that is yours to do. After John shares this wisdom, he shares a second part: He points people toward Jesus. We labor in vain if we are only relying on our own strength. With God's help, we are able to do the work that is ours to do."³

Do what is ours to do and point people toward Jesus, on the Way, on that path of peace. What should we do, RBC?

Be the place of welcome in our community.

Feed the hungry.

Support the farmworkers.

³ Kayla Craig, "Words for worship," *A Sanctified Art*.

Call our representatives and tell them our thoughts about Palestine, and Cuba, and everywhere else and about everything else.

Invite new and old friends to gather at your table.

Sing with joy.

Or maybe create a quilt exhibition that points people toward freedom and conversation.

Volunteer at the ACCA Food pantry.

Fill the shelves.

Pray for our beloveds.

Teach the kids Sunday School Class so they know they have a place where they are loved and cherished.

Volunteer at Braddock Elementary School.

Be decent human beings when the world expects otherwise.

Share love.

Do justice.

Build community.

Be exactly who God created you to be.

And every step of the way...point people toward Jesus.

Craig continues, "We are all called to participate in God's restorative story—a plan set in motion from the creation of the stars. The work of our hands and our hearts takes time, but that doesn't mean our labor is in vain. Our work might seem small or insignificant, but when we look at the lineage of Christ and the history of God's people, we see lots of ordinary, flawed people giving their small and shaky "yes" to God. Could they have fathomed that their lives were part of an extraordinary story where heaven breaks through and alters the course of history? Only we can see that now.

Labor pains of the world are real and often feel never-ending. But as we journey toward the birth of Christ, we must remember the promise that new

life can spring from pain. Each good work, no matter how small, is a thread in the fabric of God's ongoing creation story—one where love overcomes, peace prevails, and new life emerges.

John's directives resonate with the words found in Isaiah 58, where the prophet calls us to be the "repairers of the breach, the restorers of streets to dwell in." This passage invites us to bring forth restoration through ordinary actions: feeding the hungry, serving the oppressed, and comforting the afflicted. It's about the cumulative power of small acts that weave together to create a fabric of communal flourishing.

A popular quote stems from the Hebrew Bible's admonition in Micah 6:8: "Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it."⁴

Because as Isaiah says,

Then we shall call, and the LORD will answer;

we shall cry for help, and God will say, Here I am.

If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,

if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.

The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong;

and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.

Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;

you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;

you shall be called the repairer of the breach,

⁴ *ibid.*

the restorer of streets to live in.

May it be so.