

From Roots to Fruits – Luke 3:7-14
(Parallel Passages: Matthew 3:5-10; Mark 1:5)
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis
Union Baptist Church – October 8, 2017

I. INTRODUCTION

How many of you enjoy gardening or growing things? For those of you who didn't raise your hands, how many of you at least enjoy the beauty of a well-tended flower garden or the fresh produce of a vegetable garden or fruit fresh off a tree? Even if we don't care for growing things ourselves, all of us enjoy the fruits and produce that come from the labor of those who do. In fact our very existence depends on it.

I myself do enjoy growing things and I especially enjoy fruit fresh off a tree. And when it comes to the fruit trees we can grow here in Eastern Oregon, peaches are one of my favorites. Well, this past summer, I was heading into Grocery Outlet to see what kind of bargains I could find, and as I wandered through the store I came across a display of fruit trees at rock bottom prices. If they had been at Walmart, they would definitely have been in the "hospital" section of the garden area, which I often end up in looking for deals and feeling sympathy for the poor, sickly plants I'm just sure my tender, loving care can revive.

Well, as I looked at the poor, sickly, fruit-tree specimens at Grocery Outlet I noticed that there were some peach trees in the mix that were just calling out for someone to rescue them. And for just \$9.99, I decided I could afford to offer my services to one of the desperate trees. The possibility of fresh peaches someday sealed the deal. Well, when I got home with my new peach tree, I found the perfect, sunny spot to plant it and started my tender, loving care. The fact that there were only about four tiny leaves on the whole tree didn't faze me. Over the next few weeks, I carefully tended my little tree and convinced myself that the four leaves were getting bigger. Well, they were still green at least. "Give it time," I kept telling myself. I continued to water it. I trimmed off a few dead, diseased branches. I waited patiently for signs of improvement that just never seemed to come. And then there was the day when I went to water my tree and all four leaves were gone and all that was left was a sickly brown stick of

a trunk. What little signs of life that were there the day before had been carefully and probably mercifully finished off by a hungry deer. The tree, for all intensive purposes, was a goner.

I waited a week or two to see if any signs of life would peek out, but in the end all hope was lost and the only thing left to do was pull up my dead tree, stack it on my yard waste pile, and cut my losses; which were only \$9.99 and a fair amount of time, at least! In never growing, never turning over a new leaf, and being too weak and unprotected to withstand the predators, the tree showed me what was probably true about it from the moment I bought it at Grocery Outlet. It was a bad tree that would never grow and bear fruit, no matter how much loving, tender care it received. Only a miracle of God could have turned it around and enabled it to actually grow and bear fruit.

Well, my experience with my peach tree has some similarities to what we're going to learn in our study of Scripture today. This week we're going to continue on with John the Baptist. Last week we saw his call by God to clear the way for Jesus Christ, which he began fulfilling by preaching *a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*. John was a voice in the wilderness telling people that the way they could receive forgiveness and prepare the way for Jesus Christ was through true repentance. If you'll remember, we defined repentance last week as a "change of mind" about sin. To repent is to acknowledge your own personal sin, asking God to change you as you start walking in the other direction. And what we discovered is that true repentance is necessary both at the moment of salvation through Jesus Christ and as we continue on in our walk with him throughout our lives. When we sin, the resolution of it and the full relational benefits of forgiveness are both dependent on our true repentance toward both God and any people we've harmed. And what we concluded is that repentance prepares the way for God's work in our lives, meaning we all need to learn how to engage in it on regular basis. And, as all things do in God's kingdom, it the act of repentance begins and continues with a calling out to God to grant us the true repentance we need, because we can't generate it on our own.

Well, as John preached this message of repentance, large crowds of people from Jerusalem, all Judea and all the area around the Jordan River were flocking to him. Today we'll see how John interacted with these crowds and what he taught them and us about the roots, the fruits, and what I'd like to call the boots of true

repentance. Pretty catchy, isn't it?!...Roots, fruits and boots! That'll help you remember what we talk about today.

II. THE ROOTS OF TRUE REPENTANCE (Matthew 3:5-6; Mark 1:5)

Turn with me in your Bibles, if you would, to Matthew chapter 3, verses 5 to 6, where we'll begin our study today. These verses give us insight into the roots of true repentance. We're using this tree analogy today, because John the Baptist uses it in our main passage in Luke, which we'll get to shortly. So let's read verses 5 through 6 of Matthew chapter 3, which report what happened as John came with God's message of repentance:

5 Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; 6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

In these verses, we see two important things going on that form the roots of true repentance: *confession of sin and baptism*. Now think about roots with me for a moment. We all know that every tree's health is dependent on the health and strength of its root system. The roots are what determine everything else that happens with the tree. If the root system is unhealthy and weak, then the tree will be unhealthy and will produce bad fruit or no fruit at all. Well I want to show you how confession of sin and the spiritual realities tied up in baptism are the key elements needed to grow the roots of true repentance.

Confession of sin

Let's talk about confession of sin first. Notice that as John preached repentance as the way to prepare the way for Jesus, he was baptizing people *as they confessed their sins*. In other words, the only people John was baptizing were those who were willing to admit and confess their sins. It sounds obvious, but true repentance cannot happen until a person is willing to admit and confess sin. You can't repent of something you won't admit and confess. And there's no resolution until you're willing to confess and have a true desire to change. Confession of sin might be thought of as the healthy, nutrient rich ground from which the roots of a transplanted tree can finally start growing after being root-bound in a tiny little pot.

But there's still something more needed to establish the tree and enable it to grow strong roots: **water**. Think about this: Is confession of sin in itself enough to resolve sin and take care of its consequences? Is just admitting sin enough to fix it? No. Just naming a sin doesn't make it go away. Something else needs to happen: God needs to give life to the tree and add water. He needs to do something in response to that confession if we want true resolution and freedom.

Forgiveness of sin

Well, as we engage in true repentance, confessing our sins and asking God to enable us to go in the other direction, God responds with the water that will cause that newly transplanted tree to start growing: he grants us forgiveness and new life in response to our repentance. Remember, John was preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The full benefits of new spiritual life through Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit were not yet being given through John's baptism. That would happen after Jesus went to the cross and rose from the dead. The message from that point forward was repentance and faith in Christ's work on the cross for forgiveness and new spiritual life. But how was that forgiveness symbolized for both John and now for us as believers in Christ: through the waters of baptism. The spiritual realities symbolized in baptism represent the water and new life God gives through Christ that starts growing the root system of our trees.

The symbolism and basis of baptism

So what are some of those spiritual realities symbolized in baptism? Well, first, as we already mentioned, is the forgiveness of sin...the washing away of sin. As a person goes fully under the water, every part of their body is washed by the water...representing the spiritual reality that all sin is washed away and forgiven on the basis of the blood of Christ as we repent and believe in him.

Secondly, water in Scripture often represents the judgment and justice required to pay for sin. The waters of Noah's Flood and the waters of the Red Sea are two examples of how water symbolizes judgment and justice in Scripture. Similarly, the waters of baptism also speak of the judgment and justice required for sin. Forgiveness didn't come for free. Judgment and justice had to be carried out by God the Father and borne by his Son Jesus Christ to make forgiveness possible.

Thirdly, baptism represents the death that always has to precede new spiritual life. To make new life and forgiveness possible for sinful human beings, Jesus had to actually die for our sins, but in that dying he conquered death itself and made new life possible for all who would repent and believe in him. We also have to die to ourselves as we surrender to Jesus Christ. Going into the water represents our dying with Christ and coming out of the water represents the new life and resurrection that follows. The roots of true repentance grow out of the soil of sin's confession and the water of forgiveness and new life through faith in Christ.

III. THE FRUITS OF TRUE REPENTANCE (Luke 3:7-9; Matthew 3:7-10)

Turn with me now, if you would, to Luke chapter 3, verses 7 through 9, where John the Baptist teaches us about the fruits of true repentance. As the crowds of people came to John for baptism, along with them came crowds of Pharisees and Sadducees, the Jewish religious leaders. And John had some pretty stern, but informative words to share with them. Beginning in verse 7 of Luke chapter 3:

7 So he began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 "Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. 9 "Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

The nature of false repentance

Now the beauty of our harmony of the gospels study is that Matthew's account of this event clarifies that John is actually speaking here to the crowds of Pharisees and Sadducees, not just to ALL the people coming to him. In other words, the Jewish religious leaders are the ones whom both John and later Jesus refer to as a "brood of vipers." Do you know what a brood is? A brood is another word for offspring. So John is addressing the Jewish religious leaders as the offspring of venomous snakes...in other words, poisonous snake babies. Yikes! It's hard to imagine a worse thing you could call someone. John doesn't seem to have any concern for political correctness or "safe zones" does he? I read somewhere recently that the bites of baby poisonous snakes, which often look like worms, are

even more deadly than the bites of adult snakes. So I'd say this is a pretty bold, intense statement about the character of most of the Jewish religious leaders. They weren't just harmless garter snakes, they were intensely poisonous vipers whose bites could kill people.

So what was the problem with the Pharisees and Sadducees that warranted this harsh label by John and Jesus? Well, the problems were many, but in these verses the direct problem John identifies is false repentance. As they did with everything else, most of the Jewish religious leaders were simply going through the motions of religion...keeping a list of rules for appearances, while being totally untransformed on the inside. And as they came to John the Baptist, they found in his message simply one more ritual to go through...one more rule to follow...one more way to look good and religious to other people. They wanted to do baptism without repentance and true heart change. They wanted to go through the motions without dealing with the problems in their hearts. They wanted their trees to look healthy and fruitful when in fact they were dead. But John would have no part in this deception and did everything he could to show them how deadly and poisonous false repentance is.

The future of non-fruit-bearing trees

And John didn't stop by calling them a "brood of vipers." He also told them they were on a path to wrath and that unless their trees began bearing good fruit, they would eventually be chopped down at the roots. Like my miserable peach tree, they would one day be pulled up and thrown into the burn pile if evidence of life and health didn't appear. And notice that their dead trees would be chopped down not at the trunk, but at the roots...a full removal of the tree with no chance for shoots to start growing from the stump. John describes an axe that is laid by the roots of every human tree. And those that never come to life through true repentance and faith in Christ and start bearing fruit, will one day be chopped down and thrown into the fire.

I don't know what more John could have done to get their attention and ours and show the gravity of the situation. They, as do all human beings, desperately needed a miracle like my peach tree did...one that would awaken them to life and health and provide the nutrients, water and sunlight needed for growth and fruit bearing.

The fruit-bearing of true repentance

And this miracle would only take place as they personally engaged in true repentance and confession, calling out on the mercy of God and receiving his forgiveness and the power to change. And when this happened, when the repentance was true, it would be shown to be true by fruits God would grow on their trees. True repentance, followed by forgiveness and new life, always leads to a changed life, to action, to fruit. And true repentance is always a personal choice we all must make as we call out to God.

Unfortunately, the Pharisees and Sadducees were not willing to make this choice. They were relying on their heritage and the fact that were related by blood to Abraham. They assumed they were guaranteed God's blessings simply because they had been born Jews. But John reminded them that we're never saved from the penalty of sin by the family we're born into. Instead we're saved from the wrath and penalty for our sin only by making a personal choice to accept God's gift of salvation and forgiveness through true repentance and faith in the good news of Jesus Christ. And only when that personal choice has been made, does God bring us to new life, grow our root system and start producing leaves and fruit on our previously dead tree.

IV. THE BOOTS OF TRUE REPENTANCE (Luke 3:10-14)

Well, fortunately John did get the attention of some people as he spoke these words to the Pharisees and Sadducees. Listen to what happened next in Luke chapter 3, verses 10 through 14, verses I'd like to summarize as, "*The Boots of True Repentance.*" In other words the walking, moving, practical action that flows out of true heart repentance:

10 And the crowds were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?" 11 And he would answer and say to them, "The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise." 12 And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" 13 And he said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." 14 Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And what about us, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages."

The questions, the questioners and the answers

While the Pharisees and Sadducees as a whole were rejecting John's call to true repentance, the common people, the tax collectors and the soldiers wanted to know more. They wanted to know what the boots of true repentance looked like. What kinds of actions should flow out of true repentance? They all asked, "What then shall we do?" What will our changed life look like?

When the crowds asked him what to do, he told them that those who had extra food and clothes should share with those who had none. When the tax collectors asked him what to do, he told them to collect only the amount of tax that had been authorized. In other words, stop taking an extra cut for yourself. When the soldiers asked him what to do, he told them to stop using their power and false accusations to take money from people. Instead, they should be content with their wages. These are the examples John gave us of what the boots of true repentance look like.

The focus of true repentance is loving God and loving others

And if we boil down to the core of what these actions are about, I think you'll see two principles emerge that will be quite familiar. The first is the principle of contentment. In each case, John instructed people to be content with what God had given them and to avoid greed, which the Bible labels as a form of idolatry. This is the "**loving God**" boot of true repentance. Rejecting greed and pursuit of what the world has to offer and being satisfied with God and content with whatever he's given you to enjoy...a deep-seated satisfaction with God and passionate pursuit of the One who gave life to your tree and is causing fruit to grow on it.

And it's actually this attitude of contentment and satisfaction in God that leads to the second boot of true repentance, which we'll call, "**loving others.**" As we find contentment and satisfaction in God alone...embracing the truth that "the Lord is our portion;" we are then freed to generously share what God has given us with others in need...to truly love others in practical action and meeting of needs. These are the two boots of true repentance, forgiveness and new life in Christ: loving God and loving others...the Greatest Commandments. This is what the fruits God will grow on our trees look like in our everyday life. Our love for God

and others will flow out in practical ways as a result of the true repentance and faith through which God brought us to new life and which still empower our continued walk with him. And this is how others will know that we God's children...that we are Christians. They'll know it by the practical love for God and others that will grow on our trees.

V. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

As we wrap up today, I want to leave you with this short, memorable statement of the key truths we've learned today. Are you ready? Here we go: ***True repentance producing true love marks true children.*** It all begins with true repentance. Don't ever leave that out.

True repentance, involving confession of our personal sin and a prayer for change by God's power, is what prepares us for God's new life in Christ. It's the first and necessary step. True repentance from the heart brings God's forgiveness when we join that repentance with belief that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for our sins, and conquered our sins forever by rising from the dead, and when we invite Jesus to save us and be in charge of our lives from here on out. At that moment God transplants our dead tree into nutrient-rich ground, adds water with Miracle-Gro, and brings our dead tree to life. And this all begins with true repentance as we confess our sins and call out to God in faith.

And if through true repentance God has performed this miracle within us and transplanted us into healthy ground with nutrients and water, he will grow leaves and produce fruit on our new tree as we continue to engage in regular repentance when we sin and thereby stay connected to his presence and power. And that fruit God brings will be love for him and love for other people expressed in practical action...action that is motivated by his love for us and empowered by his Spirit. And people will know by our fruits that we are God's trees, God's children. ***True repentance producing true love marks true children.***

Do you want to know what happens when we reject our need for repentance and refuse to do it from the heart? Well, Luke, in chapter 7, verses 28 to 30, tells us the sad truth about what we're really doing if we reject our own need for true repentance. Listen to what Luke says after Jesus makes a statement about John the Baptist. Beginning in verse 28 of Luke chapter 7:

8 "I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." 29 When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. 30 But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.

Luke reveals in these verses that most of the Pharisees had ultimately rejected John's call for true repentance and refused to confess their sins for baptism. Because of that refusal John did not baptize them. And what had they really done by refusing to repent? They had rejected God's purpose for themselves. God purpose for them was mercy and forgiveness and love, but it could only come through true repentance.

So where are you today in this process? Are you a person who regularly repents? When you sin, do you stuff it and ignore it and hope that "time heals all wounds?" Or does it drive you crazy until you get it resolved with God and any people you've harmed? Wouldn't it be amazing if we all engaged in regular and frequent repentance? Imagine how many relationship breaks would be healed and resolved if we just humbly owned up to our own contribution to problems and asked for forgiveness. Imagine how much better we'd become at loving each other and being unified as Christ's body. And imagine how much more connected and effective we would be with God if we never let sin take root in our lives and hinder our fellowship with him. This is God's purpose for us. Let's not reject it.

Why does God want us to repent? Why is so important to him? Because he loves us so deeply as our Father. Like we love our kids and find some of our greatest joy in seeing them happy, healthy and thriving, so God loves us beyond what we can imagine and delights in walking with us down good paths that lead to life, hope and joy. He longs to see our trees healthy and full of fruit. And our good Father knows that repentance is the only way we can break free from sin and it's damaging effects, live life as he intended, and fulfill the purposes for which he designed us. The path to his fruit in our lives...to truly learning to love God and others as he has loved us...begins and continues with repentance. Lord, mold us to be a people who are quick to repent from the heart and who, in so doing, embrace your purpose for our lives, experiencing the beautiful fruit of true love for you and others that only comes through true repentance.

SERMON STUDY GUIDE AND APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Read Luke 3:1-14 and Matthew 3:1-10 several times, asking the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read. Look at the surrounding verses, take your time and talk to God as you read and meditate on it.

Write down from the passage or from what was shared in the sermon: 1) a truth that stands out to you; 2) anything you believe God is showing you or telling you personally through it; 3) any related Scripture that comes to mind; 4) any questions you have.

In the sermon, Pastor Joe identified what's needed to grow the roots of true repentance in Mathew 3:5-6. In your interaction with someone who doesn't know Christ, how would you share with them what's needed to bring life to their "tree" and start growing roots (in other words, how to be saved through Christ)?

Identify some key verses you can use to share the gospel.

Assuming you have come to salvation through Christ, what has God changed since you repented and became a believer...what are some of the fruits God has produced on your "tree?"

What are some things in your life that are slowing down the growth of fruit on your tree? What needs to change and is repentance needed?

Think about this: God calls us to repentance because he delights in us as his children and longs to see us healthy and fruitful and full of joy as we experience the full extent of his love. Consider his good intentions toward us by meditating on Ephesians 3:14-21.

Familiarize yourself with the gospel presentation on the following pages and consider memorizing some or all of the verses.

THE GOSPEL

According to the Scriptures

Mark 1:14-15

Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

Acts 4:12

[Speaking of Jesus] "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

Romans 3:23...6:23

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Acts 3:19

"Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord..."

Acts 16:31

They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Romans 10:9-11,13

That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved...for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

A Prayer to Accept God's Free Gift of Salvation

God, I admit that I have sinned against You...
I turn from that sin right now...
I don't want to live my life that way anymore...
Jesus, I believe that you died on the cross for my sins...
And that you rose from the dead...
Right now, I put my trust in You alone for my salvation...
Jesus, You are my Lord and my Savior...My life is Yours...
Thank you for forgiving my sins and making me a new creation...
Thank you for giving me Your Holy Spirit and adopting me as your child...
Teach me through Your Word how to live life with You...
Amen.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

1 John 5:11-13

And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.