

Merry Christmas, Ya Filthy Animal
Luke 3:7-18.
Rev. Misty Howick

In 1990 Kevin McAlister charmed his way into our lives in a Christmas movie titled “Home Alone.”

If you recall, Kevin was an 8 year old who always seemed to get overlooked by parents, and siblings, and extended family. Before the family travels to Paris for Christmas, Kevin wishes that he did not have this family. He wakes up to find that his house is empty. His family is gone - they have left for Paris without him.

This ridiculous scenario leaves Kevin at home. Where he tries to get the attention of his absent family by eating junk food and watching “filthy movies.” This particular filthy movie is titled “Angels with Filthy Souls.” It is only 1.5 minutes long. It was a clip made entirely for the “Home Alone” movie. It is reminiscent of a gangster movie and in “Home Alone” the clip ends violently, and the main character tells his now deceased partner “to keep the change, ya filthy animal.”

In “Home Alone 2” we see a different clip in the same genre, with the same actor from “Angels with Dirty Souls.” In this one, he is calling out his lover for being unfaithful. It ends violently and the main character says, “Merry Christmas, Ya Filthy Animal.”

Kevin uses these movies to “call out” and intimidate the robbers who are trying to burglar his house. And, in “Home Alone 2,” to keep his place in a nice hotel while he waits for family to find him, and also stop the burglars from movie number one from causing more destruction.

And in general these filthy movie clips are just that...intimidating.

And that is what I am left feeling after our opening scripture line.

John the Baptist says, “You brood of vipers, who told you about the wrath to come?”

It says John said it to the crowd. We know that in the crowd who were called out to come see him in the wilderness, were some of the general population, tax-collectors and soldiers. In my mind, you also had the Pharisees -although un-named. We could probably look in our lives and add a lot of people to the crowd who would want to hear what this popular, extreme, or extra preacher was doing in the desert. The millionaires and billionaires, sports and movie stars... Tik Tok, YouTube and social media stars. CEOs of corporations... governmental leaders... Even I would turn up to hear John the Baptist.

And even I would get the stink eye from John and the message that whatever privilege I thought I had,

whatever ancestry, whatever tradition, it was not enough to be in good standing with the one who was coming.

“The preacher from the desert addressed the crowd, the tax collectors, and soldiers with an uncompromising demand for fairness and justice. Generosity and unselfishness were the proper fruit of repentance. For the Baptist, repentance had less to do with how fervently one prayed, or how faithfully one attends the worship service. Instead, it had everything to do with how one handled riches, executed public service and exercised stewardship.

“John does not call his listeners vipers, he calls them a brood of vipers. The brood “gennematta” are the children, produce, or even fruit. The use of the word “brood” links the name calling to the question about who warned them to flee the wrath to come. Surely the snakes for whom they had come could not. Is the accusation against the listeners or against their ancestry, their authority, their tradition?”

The crowd is instructed to bear fruits worthy of repentance. Show you are a changed person, show that you are listening to God and want to honor God. Don't just rely on the history of your people and its stories...show others what it means to be a God-follower.

Wesley D. Avram reminds us, “We are as the tax collectors- dependent upon unjust structures for our livelihood. We are as the occupying army- caught in a culture of exploitation and violence.”

Just as John the Baptist calls out the people from where they think they came, and the privilege associated with that upbringing or ancestry, so do we need to be aware of who influences us, from where we come. It is not in the wake up call, the proclamation that can truly lead us to the repentance to which baptism calls us. It is in the One who does more than water the tree; it is in the one who is the tree of life itself; it is in the One who is coming.

And that is the good news. John is here to help the people prepare for the Messiah. He offers them a bath of renewal, to clean them of the past. Jesus will offer them something far less tangible, but even more important. John offers them a band-aid for the troubles they cause and receive. Jesus will offer life from the source so that they will have that life living in them.

The good news is that we are all filthy animals in need of repentance, and John reminds us that our path to God starts with a heart ready to do better. And the physical, seen, actions that come from that changed heart are also what God desires.

In our advent study someone commented that they love our church

and all the opportunities that come for socialization, study, discipleship...etc. But they know that God is calling them to get out and make friends and join groups where they can be a light to others outside of the church.

Last week I told you I was going to make a list of the areas/people/situations of forgiveness that I was still holding onto. And I did. I searched my mind and my heart for those places where I knew I had experienced pain, either at my own hands or the hands of someone else. I searched for where I was now looking back in those situations. The ones that still caused me pain, I asked God for forgiveness for and for permission to let the pain from those experiences go.

How did you do?

This week. Make a list of the places that you go to socialize, to meet others outside of Spirit Song. OR, make a list of things you can do outside of your church to meet people who are not associated with Spirit Song.

Reflect on how getting to know the people in our community can help you to bear fruit worthy of repentance.

Please join us next week for the 4th week of Advent in preparation of Christmas. And Have a Merry Christmas, ya filthy animals.