PENN CENTRAL CONFERENCE

A Message from PCC

December 6, 2023

Members and Friends of Penn Central Conference,

"*...so John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*" Mark 1:4

The apocalyptic winds and words are gathering in the gospels during Advent. Those who listen carefully to the lectionary texts will hear the warnings about the coming Day of the Lord and a heaven-sent cleansing of the earth and her peoples. Nothing could be further from my reality as I buy Christmas gifts in crowded shops in Lititz or lie on the floor to plug in lighted miniature houses. Yet this week in the gospel lesson a lonely figure out of the wilderness cuts into our shopping, cookie baking, card writing, and package mailing. He is John the Baptist, calling people to repentance and paving the way for the Lord.

Mark's gospel this week is spare when it comes to John. In chapter 1, verses 1-8, John ushers in the gospel of Jesus Christ and by verse 9 Jesus himself is being baptized by him. With John, repentance is the opening salvo, the first sermon, the focus of preparation for the Kingdom of God. What does that have to say to those of us swamped with Advent doings, comings, goings, and falling prey to the general happy-anxious distraction of the season?

John the Baptist (who I sometimes think of as John the Disrupter) was a prophet who preached a gospel fueled by charisma and challenge. He developed a sizeable following, which continues to this day among the Mandean believers (in Iraq and Iran) who consider him their greatest prophet. John sounds the

Continues on back

Contact us!

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Prayers for Penn Central Conference

Ephesians 6:18 (NLT)

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

This week, we pray for each other as we continue to live into God's calling...

Redeemers UCC, Littlestown

St. Luke's UCC, Lock Haven

Sandy Hill (Kistler) UCC, Ickesburg

St. Peter's UCC, Lykens



alarm, in a sense, for the coming judgement of God. John posed a threat to King Herod Antipas (which ultimately cost him his life) perhaps because he preached a message about a different type of power. Not the power of earthy gain, or the privilege of title, but the power inherent in drawing near to God, to coming clean for the Lord. The power of knowing to whom you truly belong.

There are two messages I hear from John the Baptist every Advent. The first is to stop. Stop and listen. The radical nature of John should disrupt our easy ways. I hear him speaking to me, saying "repent." How terribly uncomfortable. Now is not the time to talk about sin! But yes. Yes, it is. John's preaching cuts through all the lights, tinsel, wrapping paper, and eggnog. A man from 2,000 years ago calls each of us to stop, look within, and repent. Repentance is not a shaming tactic. It is instead an invitation to humility. To stop and look deeply within. To question ourselves about our own preparedness and willingness to come clean for the Lord. Now is exactly the right time to turn away from the glitz of the world and consider the state of our own hearts and souls.

The second reminder from John is that only God is God. God is the one who forgives sin, and God is free. We do not own God. Rather, we open our own hearts and invite God in. We confess what has drawn us away from God and neighbor. What we have done (and not done) to damage and mar the image of God within ourselves, and within others. In response, God's grace comes to us as assurance, comfort, empowerment, and liberation.

There was a reason that Advent used to be a penitential season, like Lent. It was a time to prepare our souls for Christ's light through repentance and prayer. Our world will always be uncomfortable with John the Baptist, because he calls us back. Back to God. Back to forgiveness and humility. Take time to stop. And listen.

Peace,

Carrie

Rev. Dr. Carrie Call

Conference Minister

Penn Central Conference

Camp Director Pastor Alice shares, "please mark your calendar for next year's **HC Spirit camp at Hartman Center Campground and Retreat Center** - Sunday, July 28th through Saturday, August 3rd, 2024.

God's Dance Party
Hartman Center Winter Retreat
January 12th-14th $100

Attention youth and youth leaders (if you're not a youth leader, please pass this on to whoever works with the youth or communicates with the youth in your church):

Are you in 6th to 12th grade? Looking for a break after the Christmas season? Want to get away from your family for a couple days? Missing Hartman Center?

We can help! Come party with us at our winter youth retreat from January 12 to 14. We'll be at Hartman Center in Hartman lodge (formerly Micheaux lodge) and maybe some cabins. You can't beat the price. Use code PCC2024 for a 50% campership.

Register now and tell your friends to register too.

https://penncentralconference.regfox.com/hc-winter-youth-retreat-2024

Camp makes a great Christmas gift. Check out the summer options from our partners at Lutheran Camping Corporation's Kirchenwald (and Nawakwa)

https://www.lutherancamping.org/summer-camp/youth-summer-programs/