

GROUP RETREAT

REFLECTION

*A Christmas
Carol*

A NEW LOOM
ORG



INTRODUCTORY NARRATIVE

You'll probably be familiar with my story. It's a best seller: translated into many languages and made into many a film... some better than others, it has to be said! There have even been musicals. You couldn't really have a Christmas without me. But before I go on, I'd better identify myself. My name is Scrooge, Ebenezer Scrooge – before you imagine I'm the Christ-child! And, no, they didn't name chapels after me! Instead, my name has become synonymous with everything that's mean and stingy, cruel and unkind, bitter and twisted. I come from a bygone era when employers could work their employees into the ground, keep them shivering at their desks for want of warmth, when their families could go hungry for want of a decent wage, when they would have to beg for a day off – even Christmas day. No fair trade in my day son. When I was alive, children worked down the mines and in factories, for long hours, for little pay, without a health and safety officer in sight. You might call it slavery – I called it sound business! And my business was money, I'd make it and I'd take it: the more I made, the more I wanted, and if people suffered at my expense, so be it. Give it away? Share what I had with others? – I would rather have died! I was conceived in 1843, when Queen Victoria was on the throne. No one here remembers her, do they? So my sins were sins of a different generation, in a different time and place... weren't they? Nobody today works for anything less than a decent wage, do they? Nobody starves to death in this day and age? And no-one has to struggle like they did in my day? Everyone gets treated fairly, surely? You'd think so, wouldn't you? Surely by now we have the resources and the means to ensure that no-one goes to bed hungry, that everyone has access to clean water to drink, that everyone has a roof over their head? Of course! So why then do over a billion people live in absolute poverty? Why are there are over a billion people starving around the world? I learnt my lesson long ago from the spirits of Christmas - prophets if you like, the bible kind, not the ones I was used to. I've read my bible since my eyes were opened and I can't help thinking my story is similar to John as we read in Mark chapter 1. There's a sense of past, present and future in his story too...

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READING – MARK I (NRSV)

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; 3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’”

4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

REFLECTION

Let’s spend a moment reflecting on the prophetic message that this reading holds. John points towards deeper realities that Jesus embodies – a new relationship with God and each other that Jesus makes possible, he takes the eagle eyed view, beyond the temple, beyond death even, to the resurrection... John sees beyond the chaos to restoration.

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IMAGE



STANZIONE, Massimo 1634

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What are your initial reactions to the character of John in this image?

What does this image say about mission?

Which character in the story best represents you?

What are the similarities/differences between this image of John and images of Scrooge?

How would you describe the tone of this painting?

REFLECTION

Dickens wrote in a preface to the short novel that his intent in writing was “to awaken some loving and forbearing thoughts.” Here’s some questions that may help...

“he carried his own low temperature always about with him.” Scrooge carried a permanent coldness within him, no matter the time of year. He did not possess the trait of warmth — didn’t empathize, or console, or listen.

Do you carry a low temperature about you?

“You fear the world too much. All your other hopes have merged into the hope of being beyond the chance of its sordid reproach. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you.”

What have you lost in the pursuit of Gain?

“What right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You’re rich enough.” Scrooge thinks that merriness is based on circumstances. His nephew is poor, so why on earth should he be happy? But then Fred points out the fallacy of the question (and assumption) by pointing out that if the sentiment were true, then Scrooge should be the happiest man of all.

What right have you to be dismal?

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REFLECTION

Do you believe it? Do you believe you can change yourself? Do you believe you can change others?

Take this opportunity to find some stillness and listen to God. God speaks to us in many ways, you may hear an audible voice, you may find the answer in scripture, you may need confirmation from someone but however you hear from God he wants to speak to you today...

What is God saying this advent?

What is God calling you to?

PRAYER

In this season of Advent, As we look forward to Christmas,

Fill us with the desire to change wanton commercialism into fair trade, That the hungry may be filled with good things.

We pray for those who struggle to make a living...

In this season of Advent, As we look forward to Christmas,

Fill us with the courage to challenge Systems and structures which keep people poor, That those in power might be lifted from their thrones.

We pray for those who speak out for justice...

In this season of Advent As we look forward to Christmas,

Fill us with longing and commitment To transform despair and apathy into real change For the millions trapped in poverty.

We pray for the work of fair trade charities...

Amen

Further Resources

- Songs
 - Lo, The Baptist's Herald Cry – Williams
 - On Jordan's Bank The Baptist's Cry – Chandler
 - When Christ The Lord Would Come On Earth - Alford

- Art
 - Cristofano Allori's John the Baptist in the desert
 - St. John the Baptist (c. 1513–1516), Leonardo da Vinci