



## Grains

“Every great story seems to begin with a snake.”

*Nicolas Cage*

“The human world is dreaming; it has gone mad in its sleep, and a snake is strangling it, but it can’t wake up.”

*D. H. Lawrence*

## Field

Then John said to the crowds who came to be baptized by him, “You children of snakes! Who warned you to escape from the angry judgment that is coming soon? Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives. And don’t even think about saying to yourselves, ‘Abraham is our father.’ I tell you that God is able to raise up Abraham’s children from these stones. The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit will be chopped down and tossed into the fire.” The crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” He answered, “Whoever has two shirts must share with the one who has none, and whoever has food must do the same.” Even tax collectors came to be baptized. They said to him, “Teacher, what should we do?” He replied, “Collect no more than you are authorized to collect.” Soldiers asked, “What about us? What should we do?” He answered, “Don’t cheat or harass anyone, and be satisfied with your pay.” The people were filled with expectation, and everyone wondered whether John might be the Christ. John replied to them all, “I baptize you with water, but the one who is more powerful than me is coming.” Luke 3:7-16

## Thoughts by Deacon David Behling, UW River Falls Campus Ministry

It is a bit harsh, this reading about John standing by the riverside and preaching to the people who were coming to him to be baptized. Snakes is what he calls them, snakes. Children of snakes. And it's not a compliment. There may be some of you reading this reflection who like snakes. There may be some readers who think snakes are getting a bad rap, who think snakes are pretty cool creatures. I admit to that possibility, but I'm not one of them. I don't like snakes. And as far as I can tell at this point in my life, snakes don't like me either.

The people listening to John are not happy about his name for them, but they don't react in anger. What they do respond with are questions: what should we do so that we can stop being snakes and the children of snakes? What can we do to become producers of good fruit? John's answer is clear: love and serve your neighbor. What does this mean? Give your extra clothes to those who are naked. Feed those who are hungry. Give from what you have to help those who have little or nothing. Don't tell lies, hurt people, or steal from each other. Be mindful of what God expects.

When the people start to talk about John as the Messiah, he tells them otherwise. John doesn't know who Jesus is yet, but he knows Jesus is coming with fire and judgement. This is called good news, what John is preaching about snakes and judgement and shovels and fire. It may be difficult to see that anything is good about any of that, but there is good news in it. John reminds us that we are called to be different from others in the world, that we are supposed to think about others more than we think about ourselves. But he also tells the people at the banks of the Jordan River about Jesus, the one who brings a new and radically different way of living into the world. Jesus calls us to a life of discipleship that is made possible by God’s unconditional love. Happy Monday!

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Many Blessings upon you,  
Deacon David Behling