Intergenerational Worship

Bible Reading - Matthew 3:1-12

Year A – Advent 2 Dec 4 2016 Matthew 3:1-12

What is this: Intergenerational Bible Reading, Skit and Art Observation

Where it’s used: In any intergenerational gathering, but specifically Lectionary based gatherings.

Time: 5 minutes

Bible Focus/theme: Matthew 3:1-12

What’s needed:

- Two presenters, one as their natural self, the other an extreme John the Baptist. This character should be extremely disheveled, untidy and chaotic in appearance, with wild hair, unkempt clothes. The more appalling and alarming his appearance, the better.
- Locust – this should be recognizable as a locust, but fully edible. There are plenty of recipes ideas with everything from celery to pretzels to chocolate on Pinterest.
- Collection of domestic cleaning equipment: broom, brushes, spray bottles (containing water only), duster, cloths, sponges, bucket, mop, vacuum cleaner.
- Out of sight (and on a wet surface area) Bucket of water
- Large poster or screen displaying Art work for Matthew 3:1-12 by Chris Booth
Straightening things out: a Bible Drama skit.

Presenter: Today we continue in our Bible readings for Advent – we’re getting ready for Christmas. In some households that I know of, part of getting ready for Christmas involves tidying things up, sorting our the mess, straightening things.

For some households, that means just a quick bit of Mary Poppins-ing. For other households, it requires a major exercise in excavation. What’s it like in your household? Any cleaning traditions?

Take suggestions and anecdotes, affirming each one.

In today’s reading from Matthew, we meet a character that God sends to get things ready for the arrival of Jesus. He’s called John the Baptist – he Baptises people – that’s a kind of washing clean on the outside to show What God is doing right through their lives. He straightens things out so there’s a clear space for God new work.

So I’ve got some cleaning things here that might help us, and I need a squad of excellent cleaners to take responsibility for these for us.

- Call some volunteers out to take charge of a variety of domestic cleaning items: broom, brushes, spray bottles (containing water only), duster, cloths, sponges, bucket, mop, vacuum cleaner.

So let’s turn to Matthew Chapter 3, and read verses 1 to 12.

*Enter ‘John the Baptist’ character, ranting in loud gruff tones, with flailing expansive gestures, random phrases from his speech in the text: e.g. “Repent!”*  
“The kingdom of heaven has come near”  
“Prepare the way of the Lord”  
“make the paths straight”  
“You brood of vipers!”  
“Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”  
“Bear fruit worthy of repentance.”  
“God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.”  
“The axe is lying at the root of the trees”  
“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

(the less sense this makes, the better)
Presenter: Excuse me sir, you’re most welcome here, but we were about to read the Bible.

John: I know. That’s why I’m here.

Presenter: Right. Good that you’re enthusiastic to read the Bible. But you can’t just suddenly appear and start ranting on about the kingdom of heaven and repentance....

John: (an aside to the audience) I think if you check the Bible reading, that’s exactly what happens. I appear and start ranting on about the kingdom of heaven and repentance....

Presenter: So as I was saying, in today’s reading from Matthew chapter 3, we meet a character that God sends to get things ready for the arrival of Jesus.

John: Prepare the way of the Lord! Make the paths straight!

Presenter: (A little uncomfortable, but making an effort to be gracious) Ah, perhaps you’d like to take a seat while we read the Bible...

John: I don’t think so. I didn’t say I was here to just sit and listen to the Bible – crikey, as if anyone could sit around and just listen to the Bible – it’s a fireball of action. No way. I said I’m here for the Bible reading. To actually make it happen here! And, if you don’t mind me saying there’s lots of work to do here. You mentioned straightening things up, getting ready for the coming of Jesus – well I’m your man – I’m here to help. We’ll get this done in no time.

Presenter: You’ve got to be kidding! You don’t really look like you’re capable of tidying anything. You look like a bit of a mess yourself – like you’ve been out in the wild. And what do you mean there’s lots of work to do here? By your standards, we are extremely respectably tidy...And we’ve got our cleaning squad, equipped and ready.

John: Ha! Respectably tidy!!! That’s not the kind of straightening up God is interested in. I’m not doing a bit of tidying. Do I look like Mary Poppins to you??!! Not just a bit of spit and polish, a bit of shove-things-under-the-carpet, hide-it-under-the-bed. Look, you can keep your brushes and brooms and spray bottles. As we read the Bible you’ll see that the kind of clean up God has in mind needs a bulldozer, a whole river, and an axe!

Presenter: Wait, wait, wait...no one is going to use an axe in here!

John: Why don’t you read the Bible already. Then we’ll see.
Presenter:  *(relieved)* Good, yes, right, read the Bible, that sounds safer.

John:  *Ha! (mumbling beneath his breath)* Read the Bible safer! I don't think so...

Presenter:  As I was saying – our reading today comes from Matthew chapter verses 1 to 12.

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming,

John:  *(interrupting and booming with full apocalyptic zeal)* "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Presenter:  *(realizing who John is)* This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

John:  'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

Presenter:  *(examining each item of John’s apparel as its is described; John pulls out a ‘locust’ and relishes eating it)* Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

*(John exits, splashing sound effects are heard, and he returns with wet hair and (superficially) wet clothes (A few splashes will do)*

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them,

John:  *(with wild gestures and pacing around)* "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance.

Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor
and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Presenter: (Calmly) Are you done?

John: Yes.

Presenter: Really? All that ranting and calling people Vipers, threatening to axe the trees, getting stuck into people with a pitchfork, burning with unquenchable fire – and now you’re done?

John: Yes. (A bit meekly) Well, you said the reading was only up to verse 12. So that’s it.

Presenter: Right. Well, was all of that Axing and Burning and Road Straightening really necessary? We would have been quite happy with some dusting, sweeping and mopping.

John: (getting intense again) Necessary? Necessary? Yes – it was. I’m talking to people who were continually acting with injustice, oppressing and exploiting others. This message isn’t just for anyone. It’s for those with responsibility to protect the vulnerable, who have done the opposite. And so it is absolutely necessary. God wants none of that in his kingdom, and as his kingdom is coming - here – amongst us – that stuff has got to go. God’s on to it, and so am I! We all should be.

THAT’s the kind of getting ready we need. I’m going to leave you to it – but If you don’t mind me saying – I think you should read it again. (exits)

Presenter: You know, I think that’s not a bad idea. Matthew Chapter 3 verses 1 to 12

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This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.’”

Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

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