

Prepare the Way in the Wilderness Second Week of Advent

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Matthew 3:1-12

December 4, 2016

This is the second week in Advent; I can't believe it is only 3 weeks to the day until Christmas. Yes I don't know how many of you realize that Christmas is on Sunday this year, and yes we are having a service, we will have one service at 9:30.

Since Christmas is getting so close I'm sure all of you are starting to think about all the preparations and shopping that you will be doing in the next three weeks, it never seems that we are ever ready in time but here comes John the Baptist to straighten us out.

John the Baptist is the voice of Advent, every year during Advent we hear the voice of one crying in the wilderness, John's voice telling us the Good News of Jesus Christ.

We are all familiar with John, even though he lived over 2000 years ago, we know his story, and he wears camel's hair, eats locust and honey and lives in the desert. We think he's a little strange this man who is out calling everyone to repent, be baptized and be prepared because the kingdom of heaven has come near.

But we could also be called strange if someone watched us over the next few weeks. We wear ourselves out getting prepared, shopping, baking, cooking, wrapping gifts for Christmas, but is Sunday the only time we stop and think about preparing ourselves for the Lords coming in our hearts and lives?

Are we like the Pharisee and Sadducees that John calls Vipers? What makes us think we are prepared for the coming of the Lord? John tells us to bear fruit of repentance that Christ has His a winnowing fork in His hand, and He will clear the threshing floor and He will gather His wheat into the granary but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire. What can we do to repent and prepare so we can be gathered together with Christ and not burn in the unquenchable fire?

John repeats what Isaiah, the prophet, spoke in the Old Testament, "We are to prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight."

Let's look at John as an example, he didn't build a highway in the wilderness for Christ but prepared the hearts of the people who heard him, they repented and John baptized them in the

river, right where they were gathered, they repented right where they stood on the banks of the Jordan.

Repent, what does the word repent mean? Quite simply it means to “turn around” to change direction, to face a new way, and to begin to walk on that way, leaving the old way behind.¹

John pointed out that we are to repent and then prepare the way of the Lord, and that way is not a simply highway in the desert, but rather it is a highway in our hearts, a direction and a step that we must take, if we are to be ready for Christ’s coming.

We are to examine our souls and prepare for the coming of Christ into our lives. We even sing that line in the Christmas hymn, “Joy to the World.” In the song we sing “Let every heart prepare him room.”

Prepare is the great theme of Advent, as it is the essence of nearly everyone’s preoccupation at this time. Everyone is preparing for Christmas: everyone is getting the cards ready, buying the presents, making sure that the refrigerator is full. “Preparation” is something we all understand.²

But the Advent preparation we are given in this reading is in terms of a road, to make the Lord’s paths straight. If we make His paths straight His eyes will not be fixed on the ground but directly on us as He walks to meet us.

In other words, the way of the Lord to come into our lives should be on a road that is clear and not cluttered, he shouldn’t have to fight to get entrance into our lives. I reflect on this in my own life, I notice I have too much clutter that gathers. It gathers on the roadway of my life during the season of Advent physically and mentally, to say nothing of the clutter of ordinary days. I confess that during this season I am easily distracted from the call of John the Baptist to “Prepare the way of the Lord.” It is as though the world calls me to prepare for everything but the Lord.

I think about trying to take my road from an uphill climb to making it straight by thinking about priorities. I find I need to question myself; it might be a little upsetting, but necessary. If I write down a list of what I think are real priorities on my calendar for the next few weeks would it become painfully clear that I need to rearrange them, I think so.

John is calling us to turn away from everything that clutters the roads of our lives and to look at the real priorities for our relationship with the Lord during this season.

John reminds us that if we are to have this new life, we must do a little more than want it; we must prepare ourselves and repent by changing our direction, by doing certain things differently than we have done them before.¹

To repent is to recognize that the old ways in which we have traveled lead us nowhere, and then to turn around, and to ask for God's forgiveness and help, and to start walking in the way that leads us to the light that is coming into the world.¹

The light that is coming into the world, do we really think about Christ as our light? We take the time to notice that it's dark in the morning when we wake up and it's dark earlier every night but do we think about Christ's coming as our light? He illuminates the darkness he doesn't leave us out in the cold, he is bringing his light and love to illuminate our darkness and bring us into his warmth of love, the love that warms our heart and illuminates our mind.

While we wait during this time of Advent for Christ's light to come into the world John the Baptist tells us to repent, we need to have a change of attitude toward life, and toward things that we think important. Repentance is doing things in a new way, a way that gives life both to us and to others, a way that allows the Lord to enter more deeply into our hearts.

I put together a list of some ways we might look at to prepare our lives, to turn around, and to repent during Advent waiting for Christ and his light he is bringing into the world.

Let go of some activity in your life so that will give you more time for your family, your church home, and your friends.

Take time each day to spend in God's word and live out his love for others

Say yes to sharing Christmas stories and singing the songs of the season with the children in your lives.

Invite someone for dinner who you know who is alone this Christmas

As hard as it sounds we can try to do less and relax a little more.

Speak a word of encouragement and support to a fellow worker, a neighbor, a stranger whose actions touched your life.

Pray for our family at St Aidan's and the world.

This is the season of good news, the season of preparing ourselves for the coming of Christ, the season of celebration, of rejoicing, of praising God for what He has done, and what He is doing, and what He has yet to do.

When others look at St Aidan's this Advent season can they say "Yes, something special is happening at that church, we need to see what St Aidan's is all about" So let us be a living example this Advent as we prepare the way for the Christ's coming.

Amen

1. Rev. Richard J. Fairchild 1996-2005 <http://www.spirit-net.ca/sermons/b-ad02se.php>