

2nd Sunday in Advent

Mark 1:1-8

**Hymns: 12, 13, 11, 6, 295, 514.**

**Introit: Psalm 85**

P LORD, You have been favourable to Your land.

**C You have brought Jacob back from captivity.**

P You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people.

**C You have covered all their sin.**

P You have taken back all Your fury.

**C You have turned away from Your fierce anger.**

P Will You be angry with us for ever?

**C Will You prolong Your anger through all generations?**

P Will You not revive us again,

**C that Your people may rejoice in You?**

P Show us Your mercy, O LORD,

**C and grant us Your salvation!**

P Let me hear what God, the LORD, will speak!

**C For He will promise peace to His people, to His devout people. However, let them not become foolish again!**

P Surely His salvation is near those who fear Him,

**C in order that glory may dwell in our land.**

P Mercy and truth have met together.

**C Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.**

P Truth will sprout up from the earth,

**C and righteousness will look down from heaven.**

P The LORD will indeed give what is good,

**C and our land will yield its produce.**

**ALL Righteousness will go before Him, to prepare a way for His footsteps.**

Collect: Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only - begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Old Testament: Isaiah 40:1-11**

**Epistle: 2 Peter 3:8-14**

**Gospel: Mark 1:1-8**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.  
Amen.

The text for our sermon this morning is written in the book of Mark 1:1-8, which was our gospel reading before.

**<sup>1</sup> The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. <sup>2</sup> As it has been written in the prophet Isaiah: "Look! I am sending My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way. <sup>3</sup> A voice of one calling out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord! Make His paths straight!'"**

**4 John the Baptist came in the wilderness and preached that people should repent and be baptised for the forgiveness of sins. 5 All the land of Judea and all the people of Jerusalem kept coming out to him. They were baptised by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. 6 John was dressed in camels' hair, wore a leather belt around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He preached: "He who is mightier than I am is coming after me, and I am not worthy to bend down and untie His sandal-straps. 8 I have baptised you with water; but He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,  
Peace be with you.

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for the Lord. It must have seemed like an impossible task for John, could you imagine what that would be like if the task was given to one of us? I mean, how do you prepare the world for the coming of the Lord?

I did a little search on the Internet to see how people today might answer that question. One person listed seven steps that are necessary to prepare for Jesus' coming. First, find the truth. Walk in the truth. Fasting and prayer. Find what God hates. Find what God loves. Walk in obedience and love. Reject the deeds of the flesh. Another person concentrated on the supposed economic collapse some associate with the End Times. He then listed 25 steps to prepare for impending economic hard times. One pastor had a sermon posted online where he detailed 22 principles necessary for preparation. Don't worry! I'm not going to go through those principles, mainly because preparing to meet Jesus really isn't that complicated.

John, of course, was given the means he was to use to prepare people for Jesus' coming. We'll get to those means in just a moment, but while we're thinking of the task set before John, we might also consider what kind of preparations are necessary on our part. The season of Advent, after-all, is about preparation.

When we think about preparing to meet anyone, much less God, we have a tendency to focus on ourselves under the guise of thinking of our guest. The reason is, we want to make a good first impression. Consequently, we do everything in our power to control all the variables and to get things just right.

You may remember Jesus' visit at the home of Mary and Martha. Martha tried very hard to control the situation. She ran around putting things away and straightening up around the house, preparing something to eat. When Jesus arrived, He said, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needful." Martha was trying to prepare for Jesus' coming but she was doing the wrong things.

When we focus on ourselves in preparing to meet Jesus, we tend to feel better if we have a list of things to do, or, maybe we take the humorous approach and go with the sign I saw some time back, which said, "Jesus is coming!! Look busy!!"

Preparing to meet Jesus isn't finally about what WE need to do to get ready. Rather, it's about what God has already done to prepare US. Ultimately, it's about the gifts of baptism, repentance and forgiveness and make no mistake, all three, baptism, repentance and forgiveness are gifts of God. John, the one who was

sent to prepare the way for Jesus, he proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. You see the connection between baptism, repentance and forgiveness is key.

One of the tragedies of Christianity today is that many Christians see baptism as a human work, something done to express to the world one's faith in Jesus. A good luck charm, or, a naming ceremony. God isn't the one acting in baptism, the person being baptized is! In that case, baptism is just one of the many ordinances of God that a person needs to obediently fulfill in order to prepare himself or herself for the coming of Jesus.

Baptism though is not a human work. It's a divine work. Even when some Christians undergo baptism thinking they're fulfilling some ordinance of God, God is still doing something incredible. By water and the word, He is creating new people out of old. He is drowning the sinful old nature and bringing forth a new nature, one created in the image and likeness of God.

The first thing John was to do in preparing the world for God's coming was to baptize people. So it is for the church today. Just before His Ascension to the right hand of the Father, Jesus said, "go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Once a person is baptized repentance and forgiveness follow. It's as almost as if we have become two persons. In baptism God gives us a new nature to fight against the old. We are, then, two people. The rest of the task of God is preparing us for the glorious coming of His Son is the daily battle that goes on in us between the old and new nature. The battle is often fierce and the warfare long, but repentance is worked in us by the power of our baptisms and God's Word. Lest we think of repentance as our work, our preparation, Paul reminds us, "It's the kindness of God that leads you to repentance" and oftentimes, out of His kindness, God uses circumstances in your life to bring you to repentance.

You may recall the story of the prodigal son. The younger of two brothers got his inheritance early and went off and squandered it on loose living. Having spent everything he inherited he wound up working as a labourer, feeding slop to pigs. So great was His hunger that he longed to eat even the slop he was throwing to the pigs.

At that point, we are told that **"he came to himself, (and) said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'"** [Luke 15:17.] That repentance was worked in the young man, in part, by his circumstances, but also by the kindness of his father.

God has but one response to those who turn to Him in repentance. The wayward son was received into the open arms of the father. The father forgave his son for his sins. He was simply overjoyed that his son, who was lost, had been found.

God has made us His children through our baptism in the death and resurrection of Jesus. He has called us by name and we are His. Throughout our lives He calls us to repentance through the circumstances we face, as well as, through His word and through the power of His body and blood received here at the altar. In repentance, like the prodigal son, we remember the goodness of our Father and we turn back to Him knowing that He will forgive us and receive us with open arms.

To my knowledge, it's the only place in the Bible where we are told that God ran. The parable of the prodigal, I mean. When the son came back in repentance, when he was still a long way off, the Father ran.

He ran to embrace His son. Through baptism, repentance and forgiveness, the Father is always running towards us that we might be prepared for His coming. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. **Amen.**

**3rd Hymn: 11,**

### **Prayer of the Church 2nd in Advent 2017**

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

*Brief silence*

Lord, You sent John the Baptist as Your messenger to preach the coming of Your Son. Continue to send pastors to Your Church who will be heralds of good news, faithfully calling people to repentance, proclaiming the Gospel and administering Baptism for the remission of sins. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

Lord, You are patient and do not wish that anyone should perish. We give You thanks that in Your great mercy, You continue to allow the Gospel to go forth so that all might reach repentance. Help us to live lives worthy of Your call, and keep us ever faithful as we wait for the new heavens and the new earth You have promised. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

Lord, You are the God of all comfort. Look favourably upon all who suffer from mental or physical infirmity. Grant them healing and patience in the face of affliction, and never let them forget that You are with them. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

Lord, You invite us again to Your table today, that we might receive the medicine of immortality in the body and blood of Your Son. May we receive the Sacrament rightly, so that with faith strengthened and sins forgiven our lives might be lived in holiness and godliness. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

Lord, as we in the Church on earth wait for the coming of Your Son, we remember all the saints who have gone before us and now rest in Your presence. Keep us all safe in Your arms until that day when You will gather all Your people to that place where righteousness dwells. Lord, in Your mercy,

**C hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C Amen.**

**4th Hymn: 6,**