

Prepare the Way

December 16, 2018

Mark 1:1-8

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."

This may seem to be an unusual Scripture for advent because the scene takes place during the adulthood of Jesus. However, it lays out the foundation of the ministry of Jesus. It is the Good News. Jesus is the Christ - the Son of God. It is about the messenger who is the forerunner that was sent before Christ in order to prepare the way for Christ. It ties into Advent because Advent is a time of preparation for the arrival of Christ.

Several years ago Brenda was teaching a Sunday School class and it was Christmas time and the lesson was on the birth of Jesus. I suggested for fun that Brenda tell the class that the lesson comes from Gospel of John and then wait for a response. Well, there was no response. No one reacted at all. It was funny to us because we knew that the birth narrative is not found in either Mark or John. Mark begins with John Baptist and the baptism of Jesus.

I selected this text today because it is one of preparation. We are in advent which is a time of preparation and anticipating the Advent of Christ. The arrival of the Christ is no accident. It is not just something that happened. This is not a spur of the moment decision by God. There are events that lead up to Advent that occurred centuries in advance. There is prophecy of salvation and the promise of a redeemer - the Messiah. Included in OT prophecy is **Isaiah 40:3** *A voice cries out in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.* We know that this voice in the wilderness that is preparing a way for the Lord is John the Baptist. Well, John did not wake up one day and suddenly decide that this is going to be his career path. He did not analyze his options and weigh out the pros and cons. It was his destiny of divine origin. And there is **Malachi 3:1** *See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.*

Advent has four Sundays each of which with a particular focus; hope, peace, joy, and love. In preparing for the arrival of Christ we reflect on the hope he gives to everyone, the peace he brings to the world, the wonderful joy we have because of Christ, and God's tremendous gift of love. Last week was peace. Jesus is known as the Prince of Peace. You may be familiar with this Scripture **Isaiah 9:6** *For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* What John the Baptist prepares for is Christ - the Prince of Peace. The Gospels tell the life story of Jesus. They present his humanity and his divine status. They assure us of God's promise of salvation which brings peace and wholeness. The New Testament is loaded with lessons on peace because it is a fundamental characteristic of Christ. This week is Joy. As I was reflecting on Christmas this week it occurred to me that out of all of my memories, Christmas is by far the happiest time of year. There are celebrations, gifts, gathering with loved ones, and lots

of food. It is a climatic festival. We have joy because of the gifts given to us from God. We have the gift of peace, the gift of love, the gift of Jesus - God's gift of love to humanity. Christmas is a time of great joy.

Are you ready for Christmas? Recently I was asked "are you ready for Santa Clause?" I so very much wanted to explain the disparity between a life of devotion to Christ and living in the secular world. I also know that within the secular world people have their idols and traditions that are not focused on the birth of Christ. Now there are only 9 days until Christmas. It is much better to ask "are you ready for Christmas?" When we ask that we are asking "Do you have all of your shopping done? Have you wrapped all your gifts? Or put up all of the decorations? And prepared for quests?" However, the real question is are you ready for Christ? What is going on in the Bible is a divine mission to prepare for Christ. John the Baptist is crying out to the people and preparing the way for the Lord. During this special season get ready for the coming of Christ. Slow down, step back, and prepare to receive Christ - the most precious gift of all, God's love, grace, and peace.