

As I was thinking about this morning's text on the day I wrote the sermon, a song came to my mind. *Prepare the ye the way of the Lord...* This song was stuck in my head the whole day. And it made me think. **What do these words really mean? Why was John preaching them and how do they connect to our everyday lives?**

John the Baptist was a predecessor of Jesus and he was announcing the coming of the Lord. It was revealed to John that God is coming in the human form into this world, to make its dwelling among his people. And John realized that this event is soooo huge, that he'll have to tell everyone about it. He realized that this event was so incredibly important that everyone should get ready and be 100% prepared for this miraculous incarnation of the Lord.

Prepare yourself for the coming of the Lord, (pause) **what do these words mean to us today?** We know that despite the repentance campaign of John the Baptist Christ wasn't welcomed like a king, he wasn't accepted as the one to save his people, and his paths weren't made straight. **And we can't help asking ourselves, is this message even relevant to us people of 21<sup>st</sup> century?**

When we look at our lives, our families, our relationships, what do we see? Is there a need for change, for healing, for forgiveness and a new beginning? When we look at the world around us, is there a need for more civility, for tolerance and peace? The message of John the Baptist can be a tricky one, for it straight forward tells us what to do, it says repent and change your ways, prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight." All these things are pretty clear to me, (pause) I know I need to repent, I know I need to change my way and I know I should be with my life preparing a way for the Lord. But that's exactly the problem. For as I hear these words, I am getting more and more depressed, for I know none of these things are in my power. For one minute I repent from the things I've done, and next I'm yelling at my wife and kids and don't act in the way I should, and it just goes on like a vicious cycle. You know what I mean? That's why I struggle with John the Baptist and his message that is too good to live up to.

And so what do we make out of this? See as much as confident John the Baptist is, he says, I baptize you with the baptism of repentance, but one who is coming after me is more powerful than I, he will baptize you with Holy Spirit and fire. Here lays the answer we're

looking for. The one who is coming has the power, not John the Baptist, not us, not anyone else, but the one who is coming, the child of Bethlehem, the branch of Jesse, Jesus Christ has the power to make things right again. He has the power to bring hope, joy and peace back to the lives of those who believe in him.

As much as John the Baptist wants us to be ready and prepared, he admits himself that we can go only so far. And sometimes the more we try the more trouble we get, the more we're trying to be ready, the more stressed out we are. But the point is that Christ comes whether we are ready or not. The world despite the pleas of John the Baptist wasn't prepared or ready for Christ, and yet he came for the world completely unprepared, for the world full of war, poverty, and mess, for you and me. And so this might sound quite paradoxical but I believe we can't ever be ready for the coming of the Lord. In fact I believe only the ones who give up trying to meet Jesus half way, who will give up trying to be perfect will truly be ready for Jesus. Only the ones, who in honest humility and repentance confess, "Lord, I'm completely lost without you, I cannot go any further. Here I am with my issues, my addictions, my anger, with everything that separates me from you", only these will truly experience the power of Christ' love and grace. (pause)

This Advent season I want you to give up all the trying, I want you to stop trying to be perfect, I want you to stop the rat race for Jesus. Instead I want you to pause, be still and give Jesus the chance to catch up with you, in the place you are, unprepared, imperfect, sinful and yet ready to be embraced by the grace and love of God. Be prepared for Jesus this Advent season, but not by trying to be perfect but by letting him heal you, letting him restore and strengthen you, by letting him forgive you.

You think we can do this this Advent season? Are we willing to completely give up our control? Are we willing to be baptized by the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Let Jesus be the Lord of your lives. He is coming, ready or not! We can't stop him, but through faith we can welcome him into our hearts. The gift was given! Are we going to reject it? Or are we going to accept it and use it? That's what being ready means, taking freely what has been given to us and then letting this gift change our lives for better.

Remember we started with God's spell song: *Prepare ye the way of the Lord...* and we asked ourselves a question: **What do these words really mean?** Well we found out that preparing the way of the Lord has to start in our hearts and in our lives, there is no other way. But remember it doesn't have to be so difficult, God will do it if we let him.

Amen