

Advent 2  
December 4, 2016  
St. Matthew 3:1-12  
Repentance is the Right Preparation  
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Dear friends in Christ,

Have you ever wondered how John the Baptist would have fared today? Picture Isaiah's "voice of one calling in the wilderness" standing along the banks of the White River. There John preaches, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near." Crowds of people from Metro Indy come to hear what he has to say. Many confess their sins and John baptizes them. Others come seeking only approval of their self-righteousness. John calls them as well to repent so that God does not treat them like wheat chaff in the fire.

We do not, of course, see such a man dressed in camel hair with a belt around his waist eating locusts and honey. You and I stand in his place. Now we are the voices calling out, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight paths for him." John the Baptist was preparing hearts for the revelation of Jesus of Nazareth as the Promised Messiah. We prepare our own hearts, and call others to prepare for the good news of their Savior by preaching repentance.

**Repentance is the Right Preparation.** Repentance is the only way to prepare for Christ's coming. Repentance is the only way preparation to escape the coming judgment.

Last Wednesday we heard St. Luke describe the miracle of John's birth to Zechariah and Elizabeth. God would fill this child with the Holy Spirit for his singular work of being Jesus' forerunner. Think of a herald who precedes his King to announce the King's imminent arrival. Grown up now, John fulfilled his role on the banks of the Jordan River. Jesus was about to reveal himself as the Promised Messiah. John was preparing hearts for Jesus as Isaiah had written about him centuries before.

Repentance is the right preparation. It is the only way to prepare for Christ's coming. John did not hold back in holding up the commandments as a mirror before their hearts. The law showed them, as it shows us, that we have missed the mark of perfection in our love for God and for the person sitting next to us in the pew. We are sinners who have no righteousness of our own according to the law. We deserve God's anger and eternal punishment.

This is our contrition. Contrition leads us to confess our sins as those who came out to John from "Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan" confessed their sins to God. Confession has the basic meaning of agreement. To confess our sins is to declare that we agree that indeed we are sinful and those sins condemn us to hell.

John also preached the kingdom of God to the crowds who came out to hear what he had to say. The "kingdom of God" is Christ's saving rule in the heart. It is his authority, his love, and his power that give me a new will to trust him and obey his will. The kingdom of God is forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation in heaven. The coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ is the good news my broken and contrite heart loves to hear.

I am a sinner but God has given me a righteousness apart from the law in Christ. I had no hope of the better kingdom of glory but now heaven is my certain hope in Christ. Instead of my heart leading me away from God and into sin, my new heart and right spirit lead me to approach God fearlessly and away from sin into the fruits of repentance, my godly life to God's glory.

This is repentance that is the right preparation; contrition and faith. For Christians, this repentance is a daily thing as we live by the Spirit's power. Repentance is the constant state of

our hearts to acknowledge our sin, and to believe in Jesus as our Savior. This daily repentance is the only way to prepare for Christ's coming. Recall Jesus' three advents; into Bethlehem, through the gospel, and when he comes again on Judgment Day. Repentance is the only preparation to escape the coming judgment.

John the Baptist preached God's judgment to the self-righteous Pharisees, and to the Sadducees, who were the rationalists and humanists of their day. They too had come out to see what John's preaching and baptism were all about. They had not come out to listen about the Savior because they trusted in their own good works. They were "a brood of vipers," intent on destroying Christ as Satan had taken the form of a serpent to destroy. They believed that being Abraham's descendants made them God's people.

John challenged them "Produce fruits in keeping with repentance." This was John's way of getting them to look into their hearts. "See that your lives are not the fruits faith in the coming Savior. " They would not listen. Unlike those in the crowds who believed and were baptized, they would choose to be Jesus' enemies. Still, John called them to repentance as well.

John told them this was the day the Lord had spoken about in the Old Testament. He was there baptizing with the same baptism we have. It is a baptism for repentance. It creates and strengthens faith. God had commanded John to baptize just as he has commanded us to use this means of grace.

John also told them that one greater than he was coming. Through the preaching of his Word, Jesus would pour out the Holy Spirit to create faith. His Word would pour out the fire of judgment and condemnation on those who did not believe in him.

Jesus is not only the loving God. He is also the judging God. He is like the farmer who with a winnowing fork in his hand, throws the crop into the air. The wheat kernels all to the threshing floor and the chaff blows away to be gathered and burned. The unquenchable fire of hell awaits those who do not repent but continue in their unbelief.

In just a short time, John would baptize Jesus. We observe this festival the second week in January. John would fade out of the picture more and more until his beheading at the hands of Herod. Jesus' cousin, six months older than he, would be the last Old Testament prophet to prepare hearts before Jesus began his public ministry. Jesus would reveal himself as the Perfect Prophet who would also preach repentance and the kingdom of God in his coming.

Jesus is coming again. Repentance is the only preparation to escape the coming judgment. We are the ones with that have the message today for ourselves and for others. We are not dressed the same as John, we are not preaching and baptizing in the wilderness but God has called us to preach repentance, baptize for repentance. We reveal the one greater than we. We are not worthy to carry his sandals. We are not really worthy to carry his message but he has graciously given it to us.

Today the axe is at the tree that does not bear fruits. "Produce fruits in keeping with repentance." Repentance is the right preparation. Amen. <SDG>