

"Prepare the Way of the Lord!"

Matthew 3:1-12

The Second Sunday of Advent

9 December 2007

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Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Prayer.

Advent expects a lot:
A transformation of the World.
A transformation of our Relationships.
A transformation of our Spiritual Lives.

A transformation of the world.

The prophet Isaiah
Spoke with great expectation:

That the exile of Abraham's
descendent
Would soon be ended.
The price of sin,
The wages of wandering
away from God
now being paid
placed the people of Israel
teetering on the cusp
of transformation
from an exiled people
to a people restored.

The prophet Isaiah anticipates
Transformation to come,
Not at the hand of violence or war,
Earthquake or famine
But at the hand of God's chosen;
the expected one:
Wisdom and understanding,
Council and might,
Knowledge and fear of the Lord
Will rest upon his shoulders.
With righteousness
the poor will be judged
The meek with equity
And the wicked with death.
As long as one
Is not wicked
Judgment need not be feared!
For the judgment that is the Lord's
Will bring adversaries together.
Enemies will be made friends
And peaceable kingdoms
Will encompass the world
Drawn by the light
Of God's chosen one.¹

Advent expects
A transformation of our Relationships.
This is no less the expectation of Paul,
Who was known to have difficulties
With many of his family, friends and
colleagues.
The apostle Paul writes
To his beloved gathered faithful in
Rome
"May the God
of steadfastness and encouragement
grant you
to live in harmony with one another
.... So that together you may
with one voice

¹ Isaiah 11:1-10

glorify the God and Father
of our Lord Jesus Christ."²

It is rooted in the very nature
And characteristic of God's divinity,
And in his humanity, in his persona,
To be steadfast and encouraging.
Irregardless of the temporal
Nature of our life span,
God's steadfast nature endures
forever.
His healing of relationships
Extends beyond the limitations
Of our humanity.
We work for reconciliation
With those with whom
We are estranged.
We seek repentance,
Restoration,
And forgiveness.
God's constant encouragement
Keeps drawing us back to the table;
Our relationship with the divine
Is a partnership
Of shared responsibilities.
We work,
With God's encouragement.
If reconciliation comes in this life:
Hallelujah!
If it doesn't come in this life
Then it is the steadfast nature
Of God to make it happen
In the life that is to come.

Advent expects
A transformation of our Spiritual Lives.
Advent must penetrate
The deepest
Most elemental
Essence

² Romans 15:5a, 6

Of our interior lives;
This was the message of John.
We like the Pharisees
May go through the motions of
baptism
But may give no evidence of reform.
It is not enough to speak;
We must act
Yielding our entire being
To God
For his purifying judgment.

Though we name him Omnipotent
We treat God as if
We can hide selected aspects
Of our lives
From his divine gaze.
We may throw God a bone or two,
'Look, God, how great are my
prayers!'
'Look, God, how faithful is my
attendance!'
'Look, God, how much I have given!'
All-the-while
We stubbornly refuse to change our
attitudes
Towards our enemies,
Towards our consumption,
Even towards our friends and family.
... As if God were blind in one eye ...
o, please!

Other times we treat God as a fool:
'I find God in my relationships and my
friends.'
'I find God in nature.'
'I find no need for prayer,
likewise, I find no need to be
ultimately concerned
with the world.
Stop it!
Both solitude and social justice

Are essential
To our relationship with God.
Both a personal and a corporate
Relationship is necessary.
All three aspects of the Trinity
Are vitally necessary
Especially when rooted in the
Incarnational
Mystery of Jesus Christ.
Leave that nature baloney
To the druids,
But place the cross
Front and center.

And still other times
We are a people of complainers;
Who, when compared to our Hebrew
ancestors
Enslaved by Egyptian taskmasters,
Make them look like a conflict free,
Content society!
We fight to define
Democrats and Republicans,
At the same time
Demand their reformation.
We criticize the Church
For not doing enough,
Or for doing too much.
We complain about
Politicians and nations,
About the corruption
that inevitably comes with power.
We harangue about
all that is wrong with the world,
Yet it rarely strikes us that
we may be
As unjust in our own relationships
As the principalities and powers are in
theirs.
We can't imagine that we,
In our own way,

Could be as narcissistic and self-centered
As preening politicians and materialistic misers.³

If we restrict
the entry of God into our lives,
we cannot help
but limit the power
of God's grace.
When we wonder why
our path of discipleship
seems to lead nowhere,
it may be because
we have set up
too many roadblocks.⁴

Advent expects a lot:
A transformation of the World.
A transformation of our Relationships.
A transformation of our Spiritual Lives.

Our entry into Advent,
is most effective
when it is most expansive.
When our arms are fully open,
we welcome God to embrace all of us,
every part of us.
We Christians must be
about the reform of our nations
as well as of our church.
We must be about reconciliation
with our families
and our friends.
And we must be about
the acknowledgment of our own
failure.

³ John Kavanaugh, S. J. of Saint Louis University, as found at:
http://liturgy.slu.edu/2AdvA120907/theword_embodied.html

⁴ Ibid.

What does such penitence lead to?
Not sadness, but
"glory to God in the highest,
and peace to God's people on earth."⁵

The Word of the Lord,
As it has come to me.
Thanks be to God.
Amen.

⁵ Ibid.