

Prepare the Way for the Coming King

2017-12-09 - Year B - Advent 2 - The Rev. Christopher M. Klukas

Isaiah 40:1–11; Psalm 85; 2 Peter 3:8–18; Mark 1:1–8

- Are you ready for Christmas? What do you still have left to do?
- Presents to buy? Cookies to bake? A feast to prepare? Decorating to do?
- As we make these external preparations, we need to make sure that we are attending to our interior preparations as well.

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

- Creation of the railroads for westward expansion. Mountains had to be blasted down. Valleys had to be either filled in or bridges had to be created.
- The first verses of this passage make it clear that the exile of God's people is over. That they can return to Jerusalem.
- Isaiah 40:3 "Make straight in the desert a highway for *our God*."
- This highway was not a highway from Babylon to Jerusalem for the returning exiles.
- This highway was to be built towards in the opposite direction, towards the east, for the return of God to his people.
- This indeed would have been a "comfort" to God's people.
- When we look at the Gospels, we see another level of meaning that John the Baptist is said to fulfill. He is the one who would prepare the way of the Lord, and his preparation would not be one of construction, instead he would call God's people to repentance.
- "*John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*" (Mark 1:4, ESV)

We too are called to prepare the way

- Think for a moment about those external Christmas preparations I talked about. When you welcome a guest into your home, you want to make them feel welcome. You might clean and tidy up. You might stock your fridge with their favorite refreshments. You would prepare a bed for them to sleep in.
- Now imagine that the guest who is coming to visit this Christmas is Christ himself.
- Robert Herrick, a 17th-century English priest and poet, wrote: "Christ, He requires still, wheresoe'er He comes, / To feed, or lodge, to have the best of rooms: / Give Him the choice; grant Him the nobler part / Of all the house: the best of all's the heart" (*Christ's Part*).
- If you think of your house as a metaphor for your life, where area of your house need to be tidied up to prepare for Christ's coming?
- Or to use the road building image from Isaiah, what are the rough places in your life that need to be smoothed out?
- 2 Peter 3:11-14
- How do we go about this repentance and preparation?
- One major way to prepare is to engage with God's word.

The word of the Lord stands forever

- The Bible the bestseller of all time. “A survey by the Bible Society concluded that around 2.5 billion copies were printed between 1815 and 1975, but more recent estimates put the number at more than 5 billion...the whole Bible had been translated into 349 languages; 2,123 languages have at least one book of the Bible in that language.”¹
- It is also the most useful book in the world.
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17: teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness.
- The Scriptures are one of the best tools we have to prepare us for the coming of the Lord. They are like a mirror which reveals our sin and brings us to repentance.
- Collect of the Day - “hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them”
 - These words describe a process of marinating in God’s word.
 - **Hear** is what we do in church. The scriptures were meant to be read aloud.
 - **Read** is what we do on our own in our devotional times.
 - **Mark** means “to notice or pay careful attention to” (Concise OED)
 - One way to do this is by physically “marking” the pages of your Bible.
 - **Learn** means to engage in study of the scriptures.
 - **Inwardly** digest is to ruminate, mediate, memorize, and allow the scriptures to permeate every part of your being. Like WD-40 on a stuck bolt.
- The Bible is not just an interesting historical document. For those who believe it is a source of life.
- Scripture is what we call “special revelation,” because it contains important information that you can’t find anywhere else. Especially in the way it points to Jesus.
 - “I, N.N., do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God and to contain all things necessary to salvation, and I consequently hold myself bound to conform my life and ministry thereto...” (Anglican Ordinal).
- There are lots of ideas passing through this world, and many of them are false. But the false ones will all pass away. God’s word is a rock!
- Isaiah 40:8
- God’s word is an essential piece of engaging in repentance and preparation for the Lord’s return. God’s word will convict you, and the Holy Spirit will restore you.

The Coming King

- In the end, you can’t fix yourself or make yourself holy enough.
- Instead, we need to yield control of our lives and allow God to overshadow us and conform us to his will. But remember Isaiah’s description of what the return of the Lord will be like for those who have put their trust in him.
- Isaiah 40:10-11
- “But, mighty though he is, there is nothing ruthless in his power. Towards his people it is a power working by love: the care that tends, the gentleness that makes provision for the weak...”²

¹ <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/best-selling-book-of-non-fiction/>

² J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (vol. 20; Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 277.