

If your house anything is like my house, it's beginning to look like Christmas, decorations going up, maybe a few presents already under the tree. The closets may be hiding presents from snooping children. Christmas is coming, but the church calendar says Advent. And this is every year, Christmas is certainly more fun, we want Christmas and that's okay, but Advent still reigns here in the church, among God's people. We must prepare. We don't have a baby yet, but we have a strangely dressed man, last, greatest of the Old Testament prophets, foretold to precede the Christ, proclaiming God's wrath and comfort for sinners in a wilderness, amidst our wilderness of life too, we have John the Baptist. If there ever is a preacher for our day it is from John. He cuts to the truth; doesn't care if people are offended by God's Word, they need to hear it. **The kingdom of heaven is now, at hand.** The Lord is, has, will, now comes.

John, voice crying out: **Prepare the way of the Lord. Making the way straight.** Crying out to them, to you, to all this world. He cries to the priests and to us: **You there, prepare! Make straight the way of the Lord. You need to repent and believe.** In light of the coming day of wrath, the Messiah comes to comfort the repentant; embrace, recognize Him in their midst, has come to save them. John is there not only to kill with his watery Baptism but also to make alive by the fire of the Holy Spirit. The Messiah comes to you, join you to Himself. He comes to spare you the punishment, unquenchable fire of your sins.

You must prepare. Get ready. John's message must be heard anew. The axe is ready to cut down in God's judgment, repent for now the Kingdom is here and tomorrow may not come.

You only hear John preach two things. The only 2 things to prepare you for life and prepare for death. **Repent the Kingdom is at hand** and **Behold the Lamb of God who takes away sin of the world.** In those 2 statements are all the prophets, in those 2 statements are true preparation for Christmas and for each day and the end.

**Prepare. Make straight.** How? How are we ready? How do we prepare for Christmas? Repent. Yet what does this mean? Sure, the **bearing fruit of repentance** means stop doing bad things, stop your bad habits, start doing good, stop falling into temptations and keeping hold of your pet sins and your vices. Stop.

Is that all that repentance means? Repentance means: being good at being wrong. Consider that. We so often error, and you hear it from others or in your own head. "Nobody's perfect, we all make mistakes, to err is human," And we are happy just to be graded better than 50% of our neighbors so to perhaps be on the right side of God and go to heaven. As long as we really haven't committed felonies, broken commandments of murder, theft, immorality we're doing okay. God knows we can't stop sinning so He certainly can appreciate we try, sometimes. No. Stop.

Being good at being wrong. For you work, we all do: to hide your sins, to defend your sins, excuse your actions, rationalize that it really isn't sin because you deserved it, they deserved it.

Repentance means: Being good at being wrong. That is the wisdom of God working upon you, for you to see you are wrong, sin so much more that you realize. Don't excuse, rationalize, defend, hide your sins but confess Be good at being wrong. Admit it, don't defend your actions. Confess it, we all, we are so much worse, wrong much more than we think.

John comes with all the prophets, with all of the law of God to tear us down so that we might truly confess not only that we've made mistakes, are wrong so much, but we daily and much have offended the holiness of God. This is what we need to know most of all, that what you've done is offended the holiness of God and desecrated His Word -that you and I truly deserve as we confessed a moments ago, deserving temporal, present and eternal punishment, for things we often take so lightly. The Lord comes to give **you His righteousness, a resting place in Him**; that Jesus has come to bleed and die and suffer for sinners, the likes of you. That Jesus has seen the things that you've done, He's observed the commands that you broke so often, He knows all your secret sins, and every way, thought, word, and act that you've committed and still His forgiveness and love has no end for you.

Make straight the way of your heart for Him. Lift it up to Him. Ponder nothing earthly. Rest in the grace of His Holy Sacrament. Christ speaks in His Word. You hear His voice. You are forgiven. Holy. His resting place for you here, in Him, always glorious. **The kingdom of heaven is here.** He provides for you all that is needed and gives you a future.