

Sermon for December 7th, 2014

Second Sunday in Advent, Preaching Series: Comfort and Joy—Pardon

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD
AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

On this **second** Sunday of Advent we have **just** lit the candle of Peace.

Once again today we heard words from the **prophet** Isaiah where we were given a glimpse of what God's reign of peace on earth would be like as *'the wolf lives with the lamb and a little child shall lead them'*. As we **all** know and **heard** about last week there are **many** places in this world of ours where peace is **hard** to come by. When my youngest son, Trevor, was playing baseball he had a motivational poster on his wall in his room that said, *"If it's got to be, it starts with me."* God's peace begins here. (Point to my heart.) **Within** us and it flows outward into the world.

Food for thought.

This is **also** the second week of our preaching series on Comfort and Joy. This week's topic is pardon or you might use the word *'forgiveness'*. **Sometimes** in this world forgiveness may be **just** as hard to come by as peace. How many of you at one time or another in your lives *have done something you felt you needed to be pardoned or forgiven for?* (Pause) Or what might be something even harder **yet** for us to do: *how many times in your life have you needed to pardon or forgive someone else?* (Pause) You see pardoning and forgiveness is not **always** about

words which are spoken, it can be harboring a feeling, an angst, against someone **deep down** in your heart that you cannot let go of for some reason or another. A **lack** of pardon or forgiveness can keep us from walking a right path with God and with our fellow human beings. A **lack** of pardon or forgiveness can break apart families, it can break apart communities, it can break apart countries, and it can break apart our relationship with God. It can rob us of the peace that we heard about earlier. *Pardon/forgiveness*—easy to say; **yet**, sometimes it is so hard to offer **or** to receive.

Last week we **also** heard the beginning of the readings for this preaching series which are from the **40th** chapter of the prophet Isaiah. This so happens to be part of our Old Testament lesson for today. **This** week our preaching series is focusing on verses 3-5 which is under the subtitle: *Prepare the Way of the Lord*. This **section** of the book of Isaiah was a foreshadowing of the coming of John the Baptist as we heard about today in our gospel lesson from St. Mark. Isaiah wrote, *“A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low, the uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’”*

You see the **people** to whom Isaiah was writing would have **known** about this analogy about preparing the way and making straight in the desert a highway for in **that** time the practice of preparing roads for the **victorious advance** of a conqueror or king by clearing them of obstacles would have been something of a given. The **uneven** ground would have been made **level** so there would be easier passage and the ‘*rough places*’ along the way would have been made smooth.

Isaiah is telling the people that forces beyond their knowledge or control, that ultimately **God** almighty, is preparing a route along which He will arrive and lead them. Isaiah says there is a need to heed the call for repentance by **preparing the way** for God. **Nothing** which the people can devise or do themselves will **remove** the obstacles which loom on their horizon. But to their amazement those obstacles will **vanish**, the valleys will be **leveled**, the mountains and hills will be **lowered**, the steep **heights** and the **rough** places will become smooth. For you see, only God can do this. It is God’s **grace**, God’s **mercy**, God’s **pardon/forgiveness**, that will **save** His people. When all is said and done, it is **God’s Son** who will do this for us **all**. *Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.*

As we move forward into the gospel lesson which **echoes** some of the Isaiah passage we hear John the Baptist, who by the way—if you notice—in **Mark’s** gospel arrives before **Jesus** does. John is **crying out** in the wilderness, “*Prepare*

*the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” Get **ready**, ask for **pardon**, ask for **forgiveness**, **repent** of your sins, because the One who is to come, the one who’s Good News we are celebrating, the Son of God Himself is coming and He is more **powerful** than we are. There is **no one** worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. Not then, not now, not ever. It is the advent, the coming, of a **blessed** child who will **save** us all and make the **rough** places in our lives smooth. *Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.**

So here we have it on the **second** Sunday of Advent we are called into the wilderness to hear a message. It is a message of **pardon/forgiveness/repentance**. I suppose these are not **really** the things we think of when we think about Christmas. **Yet**, the prophet Isaiah and John the Baptist **both** invite us into the wilderness to consider a message which is at the **heart** of what it means to receive the **Christ** child who **has** come, who **is** coming, and who **will** come again. For you see, it is a message which is **central** to how we move from hopelessness to hope as there can be **no** Good News of Jesus Christ apart from the message of **pardon/forgiveness/repentance**.

My dear friends, I can **preach**, we **all** can hear the wonderful sermons or messages **about** Christmas, Jesus, and what He has done for us; but if we are **not** ready to receive, if we are **not** prepared through **pardon/forgiveness/repentance**

to receive the **precious** gift of salvation this blessed child has to offer us all, then we will go through this Advent and Christmas season and miss the real **reason** for the season.

My **prayer** for you all as we celebrate this season of Advent is that our loving God through His ultimate grace, mercy, and pardon/forgiveness toward you will lift up every valley, every mountain and hill will be made low, the uneven ground will become level, and the rough places will be made a plain. *Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.* All thanks be to God. **AMEN.**