

Second Sunday of Advent (B) – Mark 1:1-8

An Attitude of Discipleship: *Prepared*

Focus Question: *How is confession and preparation a part of your daily life?*

word of life

“And people from the whole countryside ... were baptized ... confessing their sins.”

Mark 1:5 (NRSV)

Read Mark 1:1-8

“In the beginning.”

For the gospel writer of Mark, the story of the Good News of Jesus Christ begins not with a birth of a child (Luke 2) or a family tree tracing lineage back to a great patriarch. (Matthew 1) Nor does it begin with a cosmic connection of Jesus to the very beginning of creation. (John 1)

Mark begins with a clear proclamation – this is a book of good news (Gospel) about Jesus Christ, God’s Son. (Mark 1:1) And the first character encountered is a character indeed – an eccentric man with a rugged wardrobe and a sparse diet quoting the prophets and calling people to repentance – John the Baptist.

1. *If you were to write the story of Jesus, how would you begin?*
2. *What do you know about John the Baptist?*

The passage quoted from Isaiah (verses 2-3) validates and foretells the role of John the Baptist. He is the “voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord.’” (Mark 1:3)

3. *What was the key message of John the Baptist?*

His voice proclaims a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (vs. 4). Ritual washing was an important part of Israel’s worship practices. Priests were to wash themselves before coming into the Temple. The act of purification was extended to include the laity. Many religious sects, including the Pharisees and the Essene community living near where John the Baptist preached, emphasized the importance of ritual washing and purification.

4. *What are ways you prepare for worship?*
5. *How might the message of John the Baptist be similar or different if he were teaching at your congregation?*

The washing (baptism) John proclaims has a specific purpose and mission: to call people to repentance and forgiveness in preparation for One who was to come. The Greek word for *repentance* literally means to “turn one’s mind.” John called for the re-orientation of life from the old ways of doing things to a new, freed (forgiven) life of anticipation of what is about to come.

The writer of Mark describes in great detail the diet and wardrobe of John the Baptist (vs. 6), thus identifying him as someone “out of the mainstream.” He was also someone very clear about his role: to be a forerunner for One yet to come who is greater than he. (Mark 1:7)

6. *How can someone from the “outside” help us see things in a different light?*

word *among us*

Have you ever expected a very important person to come into your home? Perhaps it was an important politician, or the boss or supervisor where you worked, or maybe a religious leader, or an important member of the family.

What do you do to prepare for their arrival? You might bake something special, or mow the lawn (or shovel the sidewalk, depending on where you live). You might choose some special music to be played, or purchase a gift of welcome.

Most importantly, you probably would do some serious cleaning – dusting away the dirt, vacuuming and sweeping the floors, scrubbing away built-up grime and stains in the kitchen and bathroom.

If you were to ask your guests, most would probably say that all the cleaning and preparation really didn't matter to them. They came to see you and not your house. But the preparation mattered to you.

1. *What are some ways we prepare for important visitors in our home or church?*

“Prepare the way of the Lord.” We hear John the Baptist's voice ringing out, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John calls for a good cleaning of our spiritual houses – the gossip we repeat, the grudges from the past that gather like dust bunnies in the corners of our lives, our inattention to the poor, our captivity to our culture and its misguided values. We as disciples of Jesus have much to clean to get ready for God's coming.

2. *Why does “a good cleaning” seem to matter to John the Baptist?*

The truth is, we can never on our own get our houses completely in order for God to enter. Left to ourselves, there will always be one more spot we missed, one shelf we failed to dust, one crumb we didn't (and couldn't) see. Our repentance is never fully complete.

3. *Are the words “Our repentance is never fully complete” assuring or troubling? Explain.*

We need the full message of John the Baptist: repentance *for the forgiveness of sins*. When we have done all we can do to prepare for God to come into our lives, God does one thing more. God washes away what we cannot clean. And God comes, not because our house is in order, but to see us, because God loves us.

The guest becomes the host. The One for whom we prepare and clean, in the end, cleanses us. The One to whom gifts are given becomes the gift. Our “Advent attitude” – our attitude as disciples of Jesus – is one of repentance and thankfulness for God's forgiving grace.

4. *In what ways does God come into our lives?*

5. *What can we do to prepare for God's coming?*

Prayer

Come, Lord Jesus and be our guest. Let every heart prepare room for you. Amen

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 40:1-11



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

Copyright © 2005 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

May be reproduced for local, non-sale use provided the above copyright notice is included.

www.elca.org/evangelizingchurch/dailydiscipleship

last word

This week, pray for an open spirit
as you prepare.