

Sermon for Faith Lutheran Church-Okemos  
December 8, 2024; Advent 2 – Year C  
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Grace and peace to you from God, our Creator, and from the Lord, Jesus Christ, our Savior... the one for whom we prepare. Amen.

I think we all know... babies tend to arrive without regard for whether the parents are fully ready for them... or not.

In fact, I don't know anyone who claims they were fully prepared and ready in every way for the arrival of their children. ...and if they said they were, I wouldn't have believed them.

When my husband and I were awaiting the birth of our first child, we did all we believed we were supposed to do to prepare the way.

We... made the soft colors bright... and the sharp edges round... we filled baskets with diapers and baby stuff... and we made the rough ways in our home smooth.

And yet... we were not fully prepared. We were not prepared for how much the arrival of our child would change us...

We were not prepared for the shift in our relationship and... the love! Who knew you could love someone so much?

There was so much to do, and yet, an enormous amount of the preparations happened, not in our home, but in our hearts... and in our minds.

Preparing for God's arrival is much the same... it is mostly an internal, ongoing work that we must do to be ready to receive our God and Savior, who chooses to come to us as a lowly, innocent child.

In our Gospel today, we hear the prophet John, crying out from the wilderness... prepare the way!

This child is coming... no ordinary human child... but a savior! Prepare!

This word from God does not come to us from the rulers of the day, or even the temple leaders... no.

The word of God bypasses all that earthly power and authority to rest on John... ruler of no one and governor of nowhere... just... John, son of Zechariah.

God's word comes to us from out of the wild... a place unbound by time and unbidden to society... from out of the desert wilderness... we hear...

Prepare the way! ...for none other than the light of the world is about to break over us like the dawn...  
prepare!

Driven by love and tender compassion, our Creator, God the Almighty... has chosen to meet us exactly  
where we are.

Our heavenly parent has come down to meet us in the ordinary, the humble and lowly... to shine a holy light  
into our dark places... and guide our feet into the way of peace.

But we must prepare to receive that light... we must make ready our hearts and minds... to open ourselves  
up to the ongoing transformation that follows when you give your life over to the way of Christ.

Because God comes to us through Jesus to purify us as with the refiner's fire...

God comes to us through Jesus to wash us clean as with the fuller's soap... to redeem us... and claim us as  
God's own beloved.

God comes to us through Jesus, the Christ child, to forgive our sins and offer us salvation...

not only for our eternal life with God but also salvation in the here and now... salvation for this life here on  
earth.

Prepare the way of the Lord! ...for all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Prepare! ...we must ready ourselves to receive our Redeemer...

and know this... the work of preparation will change you... it will mold you... and shape you and draw you  
toward God's justice and mercy.

We are not passively waiting for Jesus to arrive – we are actively engaged in reshaping our senses to receive  
God in new ways.

The work of preparing for God involves repentance... *metanoia*... a change of heart... a turning back.

We turn back to Christ to be released from the captivity of our sins... so that we can recognize God with us,  
Emmanuel in our wilderness... Christ in the stranger...

We repent and turn back to Christ... so we can be liberated from the bonds of sin and joyfully engage in the  
work of preparing for the arrival of our Lord.

...Of making the crooked paths straight... of filling in every valley... bringing low every mountain... and making  
the rough ways smooth.

...It really sounds like impossible landscaping.

But it's not... it's about letting God's love wash over you and turn you over like a stone in a river...

buffing away your rough edges so you can better receive and reflect that love from God into the world around you.

But we resist change... don't we.

Especially something as life-altering as the full transformation that comes from a relationship with God.

We fall back into old habits... close our eyes to the needs around us ...and in us... because changing the status quo is challenging work!

And yet, resisting the transformational change that comes through a dynamic relationship with God is to ignore the work that God calls us into...

Resisting that transformative change is to resist the work of Christ.

Preparing the way for the Lord means opening our eyes to injustice and inhumanity... and then working to change those systems... so that *all people* will see God's salvation.

But we resist being changed, and we remain captive to our sin.

It is true that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven... you belong to Christ... and yet, we remain in bondage to our sin.

And so, we must die daily to that sin through our repentance and receive the grace that comes only from Christ.

We must repent... turn back to Jesus... and prepare the way for the Lord... Prepare for the Lord and participate in the in-breaking of God's kingdom here on earth.

For John proclaims, a new era of God's peace is dawning! And we get to take part in that luminous work!

This is amazing... this co-creating work with our God... it is incredible and beautiful work.

But here is the best news... Christ will arrive... even if you are not prepared.

Just like our ordinary human babies arrive, whether the nursery is freshly painted or not...

The Christ child will arrive.

Yes, God invites us to join in the incredible work of smoothing our rough edges, leveling the terrain, and shaping our world around love, justice, and mercy...

But the completion of this work is not dependent on us.

God calls us to prepare and participate because God loves us and desires a vibrant relationship with us...

But we are not ultimately responsible for our salvation, let alone the salvation and redemption of the whole world and the bringing forth of God's new Creation!

This is God's promise to us... that God's got it covered.

And we, faithful followers, we get to help by preparing the way for the Lord... preparing our hearts and minds, and our communities, to receive our Savior...

...so we can recognize our God with us.

I don't know about you... but I hear that as good news.

Out of pure and holy love, Jesus, the light of the world, will break like the dawn and shine over us, even if we are not ready.

Christ will shine into the darkness and into the shadow of our death... and guide our feet into the way of peace.

I want to be ready for that, and I'm certain you do, too. So... let's prepare the way.

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Will you pray with me...

Gracious and loving God, we praise you and thank you for claiming us as your own, and for not giving up on us.

You are continually forming us with your mercy and guiding our feet into your way of peace.

Help us, Lord, to prepare for your arrival so we might recognize you in our presence and receive you into our lives... and so we can celebrate as your light shines into the darkest valleys, so that all may see your salvation. In your holy name we pray, Amen.