

“Are You Prepared?”

Mark 1:1-8

John the Baptist is the dominant Advent figure. He is going to dominate our conversation throughout this season. He is really the last Old Testament prophet, even though we hear of him in the New Testament.

Mark begins his written account of the life of Christ with these words: “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Mark does not mince any words when he tells his readers about whom he is writing. Mark tells us: “This person that I am going to tell you about is the Son of God. He is the source of the gospel. He is the source of the Good News of salvation.”

This is not just some heart-warming story about a hero who saved the day. Mark wants you to know what he learned from the disciples, most notably Peter with whom he had a very close relationship. In 1Pt. 5:13, Peter refers to Mark as his “son.” At the time Mark was writing his Gospel, between 50-60 A.D., Jesus of Nazareth was the topic of conversation throughout all of the world. Jewish historians, Gentile historians, Roman officials, everyone is talking about Jesus of Nazareth and the fact that there was an empty tomb.

Mark begins his Gospel and wants you to know from the first word that this Jesus who everyone is talking about was not just a man. He was and is the Son

of God.

But Mark does not begin with the story of Mary, Joseph, and the babe in Bethlehem. Mark begins with Isaiah. If you want to know who Jesus Christ is, and what God's plan of salvation has always been, read the book of Isaiah. Isaiah spent his entire ministry preparing people for the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation. Isaiah did not have an easy ministry. He was repeatedly challenged by those who had no interest in listening to what he had to say.

Even though his message was a message of comfort for the faithful – pardon and peace, Isaiah was despised and rejected by the majority because his message also was that the strength of man and all the goodness and beauty which we want to claim for ourselves will wither and fade like grass when the glory of the Lord is revealed.

And he told the people about the final prophet that would come and “prepare the way for the Lord”. He wrote of John the Baptist. John would also have a difficult ministry – and that is without even considering that he survived in the wilderness by eating bugs (even though locusts were considered “clean” food under the covenant with Moses, they are still bugs).

Preaching out there in the wilderness, John, like Isaiah, also had a message of comfort for the faithful. He proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He preached about real comfort – from God – given to you from outside of you.

When Adam destroyed the perfection of God's creation, God came to Adam with a promise. He had a plan. Adam would not be saved by Adam. Salvation comes from outside of you. There would be a second Adam – the child

of promise, the Messiah. But before the child of promise could come, the final prophet had to come.

What did God instruct John to do to prepare the people for the coming of Christ? God had John preach a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The question then is the question today, “Are you prepared for the coming of the Lord?” To answer that question, don’t look inside of you. When I look inside of me, I find sin and guilt – a willing spirit, but very weak flesh.

“Are you prepared for the coming of the Lord?” Look outside of you. Look to your Baptism. Look to and listen to the words of the Absolution “In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Look to the altar. “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” Put your faith in the new covenant in His blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

“Are you prepared for the coming of the Lord?” Don’t look inside of you. Look to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This is Mark’s message to you. Listen to Isaiah. Listen to John. Are you prepared? Christ is coming, and I am not just talking about celebrating Christmas. We talked about this last week – how Advent serves a dual purpose. We are preparing for the celebration of the birth of Christ, and we are preparing for His coming once again on the Last Day. John, the Advent prophet asks you, “Are you prepared?”

During this time of year, we hear all sorts of heart-warming stories that are supposed to prepare us and put us in the Christmas spirit. There is but one Spirit that changes your heart this time of year, and it is not the ghost of Christmas past, present, or future. The only Spirit that brings real change is the

one that has been dwelling in your hearts since the day that you were called to faith in Baptism. In this case, you can look inside of you.

It is God's Holy Spirit who has prepared you your entire life for the coming of the Lord. You are prepared. He has called you, taught you, nurtured you, nourished you, and guided you throughout your days. Because of the faith instilled in us in our Baptism, we are here today to continue our preparation by being fed by God's Word and Christ's body and blood. It is real and nourishing food. It is the food we need to live. It comes from outside of us. The Holy Spirit brings it into us.

During Advent, as we lead up to the Christmas Season, when you are asked if you are prepared for this season, instead of giving an answer that includes how much shopping you have left to do, or if all of your decorations are up, or all of your baking is done, simply tell them "yes, I have been prepared since the day of my Baptism."

Tell them with absolute sureness and confidence that you are prepared, because the Good News that we share is, as St. Mark wrote: "the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." He is the source of our joy, peace, and hope. He is the source of the Good News of salvation this season and every season. He is the reason we celebrate.

Living under the grace of Baptism, hearing His Word, feeding on His body and blood, you are prepared for the coming of the Lord. Amen.