

Second Sunday in Advent  
Sermon Text: Mark 1:1-8  
Related Text: Isaiah 40:1-11  
Date Preached: December 7, 2008

Grace to you and peace from God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

It's all in the preparation. A good meal is one that is well prepared. A team's success hinges on how well they are prepared. Musicians devote hours upon hours of preparation into a performance or recital. What happens in this congregation every Sunday morning requires diligence in preparation, by our office staff, our Sunday school teachers, choirs, council members, committees, worship participants to name but a few.

In all facets of life, we understand that preparation is important. Now, it is true that we will not be prepared for everything that happens in life. Even as we prepare for activities and events there are times when we are surprised and have to react without being well prepared. That however, is a sermon for another time.

We are faced in our Scripture readings today with the message of preparation. Get ready. There is work to do. Prepare the way of the Lord.

That is the message to those who are in exile. That's the message from God conveyed through Isaiah, who himself is not feeling up to par. Isaiah, the one called to serve is also the one who needs this good news himself.

That is true for all of us. No matter how active we are in our lives, no matter how deeply we are involved in the life of the church, or how much we despair about the conflicting values of society, we are both the messengers and the recipients.

Prepare the way of the Lord. Jesus is coming. Yes, he has already come as a helpless infant born in a small town, to two people who have done nothing in their lives that merits mention or remembrance, and for whom history would have completely forgotten had it not been for what Jesus did.

Yet, that is not what the preparation to which the Scripture calls us now. Prepare the way of the Lord. He is coming. He is returning.

In the past several weeks the lessons have reminded us that Jesus is coming as judge. Have we lived fully as his children? Have we seen Jesus in the face of the poor, the hungry, the abused, the weak, the dying, the sick, and the outcast? If we have, have we done

anything about it? Have we advocated for justice? Have we seen to the distribution of our resources in such a way that everyone has what is needed? Have we cared for the environment God gave us?

Jesus is coming also with mercy and loving-kindness. He is coming to lift up the lowly. He is coming to complete that which was begun on the cross. That is, Christ is coming to gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom, to use the imagery of Isaiah. So, what does this mean for us to prepare the way of the Lord?

As we look at this I'll be using the image of life in the church. Keep in mind however, that church is but one component of our lives. What is true in the life of our congregation also applies to other aspects of our lives, be it our involvement in work or in other interests that we have such as social group, a service organization, etc.

God is preparing some of us to take on greater responsibilities in our Christian walk and specifically here at St. Paul's. Following worship, we will be electing individuals who are willing to accept a greater role in the life of St. Paul's to our council.

I commend each of those recommended to council for their willingness to serve. For those not recommended, perhaps we hear God calling us to take on responsibility in other areas of our congregation's ministry, be it in music, our caring ministries, faith in action, or our youth to name a few.

At the same time God is preparing some of us to let go of our doing. It is easy in the church for a few individuals to feel as if they need to do everything. Isaiah reminds us that this is not true. "All people are grass...The grass withers, the flower fades;" We are not indispensable. Rather God looks at us and says it is time for you to receive. Receive my grace. Receive my comfort. Be in a loving community that will nurture you with my love.

Whether we are called to be more involved or to step back, we each are called to prepare the way of the Lord. Such preparation is experienced in our receiving and our giving.

The focal point of our preparation is not about us. The focal point of our preparation is about the one who is coming. Jesus. All we do as a congregation and as Christians in every phase of our life is about Jesus. He is coming. He is coming with good news. He is coming to give life.