

December 4, 2016 Advent II

Matthew 3: 1-6 'Preparing for Peace of Mind'

The Advent Christmas season is such a gift. We get inspired and we go out of our way to gather, to give and to celebrate life and love and relationships. But some years it is difficult to embrace the energy and excitement of the Christmas season. Sometimes the gift of the Christ Child just slips through our grasp.

There is nothing like the first Christmas after the loss of a loved one or a painful breakup. Christmas 2001 was a devastating one for me. A marriage break up after 25 years left me bruised, broken and balling like a baby. It was like a death without dignity. That Christmas, I had a long way to go to find *peace of mind*.

Maybe for some of us that difficult Christmas is right now.

Perhaps others are feeling down or disappointed that the family isn't going to be with us this Christmas. I know I am.

Perhaps we are just feeling depressed by the weather or the reduced daylight and the last thing we need is the figure of John the Baptist preaching a message of '*repent from your sins*'.

Perhaps he sounds like an accusing voice crying out in our wilderness
*"prepare the way of the Lord and hurry up about it.
Make his path straight and stop feeling sorry for yourself. "*

John the Baptist can be off putting even on our good days. He was no wishy-washy guy. But let's stop and realize that his was an Old Testament, an Ancient World understanding of preparation. It remains too limited an understanding of repentance, of turning our lives around in the midst of life's challenges, losses and griefs.

Unfortunately, most of us have been brought up with the Old Testament approach to preparing the way of the Lord:

The muscular approach, filling up the valleys and levelling the hills all on our own.

The strenuous approach, smoothing out the rough places and straightening the crooked paths all under our own power. And it just doesn't work at Christmas.

It is the old ‘**be good or else**’.

It is the stern ‘**change your ways or else**’.

It is the intolerant ‘**straighten up and get with the program or else**’.

When has that ever helped in times of deep sorrow, or loss or feelings of abandonment?

So, why did I use this scripture and not drop it? Because we need to recognize by contrast the real change that **Jesus** brings. Remember, **Jesus** quickly separates himself from John and starts his own ministry in Galilee with a different message.

“The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the good news.”

Jesus’ good news isn’t the bad news of John. We are not all going to be chopped down to size, unless we smarten up!

The **Jesus** good news tells us “**God** is in our midst and **God** is for us no matter what!”

It all begins in this life, right now. Look what **Jesus** is up to: Healing, feeding, teaching, including and restoring people to family and friends

With **Jesus**: ***It’s kindness and compassion right now.***

It’s mercy and forgiveness right now.

So, the way I want to ***see and hear and experience*** this passage on the second Sunday of Advent is ***preparing for peace of mind right now.***

If we accept **Jesus**’ ministry of healing, feeding, teaching, including and restoring people to family and friends: If we accept in our own hearts his kindness and compassion, his mercy and forgiveness right now, then ***preparing for peace of mind*** begins with the sense of profound ***acceptance*** that finally allows us to ***be honest*** with ourselves.

You see, all too often, we assume we are innocent. We are the victims in the struggles of life. But let me tell you, from my own painful experience, we are all victims and we are all victimizers. People hurt us but we forget how often we hurt others – intentionally or unintentionally. It’s impossible to do otherwise. When we are cranky or insecure we say and do things we would rather forget. We are so connected in

the web of life and in the tangle of human relationships we can't help but step on one another's toes from time to time. Life giving relationships wonderful as they are also bring us pain and loss because we and they are finite and fallible.

Preparing for peace of mind is about *acknowledging* the hurts or pains that keep us stuck in the cycle of self-referencing. With the experience of **God's** mercy and forgiveness, we can honestly admit we are participating in the '*poor me*' syndrome, and then repent of it. It's not about whose innocent since none of us are, it's about what helps to turn our life around towards healing and wholeness. We *admit* where we are, and *acknowledge* our part in it all, good, bad or indifferent, because we know we are forgiven, loved and accepted.

Next, *preparing for peace of mind* gets traction when we begin to *accept* the situation. **It is what it is!** We can't change what has happened. It is over, done. We can't change the past, but we can choose how we respond, how we move forward. So, we let the situation be; we stop trying to control it, reject it, or argue with it.

We don't have to agree with it, approve of it, or encourage it. But we do have to allow it **to be what it is**. We have to *accept* it, and yes, actually embrace it, even if it is horrible or frightening. Because **it is what it is!** Arguing and rejecting keep us from accepting **God's** acceptance. Denial gets us nowhere while *acceptance* moves us forward with a mindfulness of what is really going on in us or around us. This is when we experience the **Christ-Spirit** shoring us up in the midst of our angst, offering us healing and wholeness, forgiveness and belonging.

God's dream for Christmas is to get physical. The **Christ-Spirit** wants to engage us in our everyday moments *intensifying* our humanity. The **Christ-Spirit** wants to get active, right in there, between action and our reaction! The **Living Christ** wants to lift us out of our pain bodies and invite us into our radiant bodies.

Application for Advent:

Preparing for peace of mind we acknowledge what's going on as honestly as we can, we accept it as fully as we can, and we allow the Christ-Spirit to work with us,

offering kindness, compassion mercy and forgiveness. Everything needed for God's New Day.

Meditative Prayer

Let's settle in to prayer. Follow your breathing inward to that prayerful place.

Sense the light and love of God's presence surrounding you: Filling you.

Know you are loved, forgiven and accepted by God.

Now bring to mind a hurt, a slight and painful experience you feel victimized by.

Hold it up and sense how in God's presence you are bigger than this affliction.

Admit and recognize your own part in it.

Know that it is still alright with God.

Turn away from feeling victimized, admit your own part in it and be free to heal.

You are still loved, forgiven and accepted by God.

Now bring to mind a memory, or an event that just sticks in your craw:

Something that you still reject or resist, or argue about.

Hold it up and sense how in God's presence you are bigger than this aggravation.

Admit that **it is what it is** and it is already in the past.

Accept that it has happened and can't be changed,

And ask God ***"now what do I need to do to seek healing and wholeness?"***

Listen

Commit to it.

You are still loved, forgiven and accepted by God.

Feel the healing, the wholeness; the forgiving accepting love of God.

Offer thanks.

See how you might be a blessing to others

And now let us join together as Jesus taught us to pray saying....