

Prepare the Way

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Luke 3: 1-6

Second Sunday of Advent

FPC Uvalde
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Well, this week we are finally getting into some Scripture verses that are a little more familiar to us. Last week, we were trying to get in the Christmas spirit and we heard about the end times.

This week, just when we are hoping to get on that candy cane and holly lined road back to Christmas, John the Baptist appears in our reading and calls us to repentance.

John the Baptist just seems to get in the way of our getting to Bethlehem, doesn't he? John is a barrier on our way because he demands that we live lives of righteousness and justice and truth, and the bottom line is that we don't. We may be just a little closer *here* today to living that life—at least we are trying to-- than those whom do not know the love and grace of Jesus Christ, but folks, we all still have a long way to go.

So, let's look at this passage today from Luke where we hear John the Baptist proclaiming "Prepare the way of the Lord."

The passage starts out with a political who's who of the day. We are already starting to glaze over just hearing those names we really can't relate to. Luke's intention with listing all those political and religious figures of the day was to say, "Hey! We speak your language. We know where you live!"

Well, the Bible, as you know is a living document, so let's put Luke's words into where we live today:

"In the second year of the reign of President Obama, when Rick Perry was governor of Texas and Pete Sheide, Danny Sanchez, Jesse Bates and Jesse Moreno were County Commissioners of Uvalde County with Cody Smith serving as mayor of Uvalde, during the time when Hilary Shuford was the Executive Presbyter of Mission Presbytery and Bruce Reyes-Chow was the Moderator of the General Assembly, the Word of the Lord came to YOU. . . and you appeared before the City Council proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Hmm, can you imagine doing that? Well, you might say that they needed a John the Baptist much more in those days than we do now. They were living in a **pre**-Christian era, not in this day and age where Christianity and God's Word are everywhere. Do you really think that is true?

We *are* still living in a pre-Christian era. If we lived in a post-Christian era that would mean that Christianity had been so absorbed into our culture that it became part of the very fabric of society—and is hasn't, as I'm sure you all agree.

Can any of us claim to live in a Christian society when there are gangs full of empty-hearted youth that exist on violence and despair?

Can any of us claim to live in a Christian society when corporate executives literally steal their employee's retirement savings?

Can any of us claim to live in a Christian society when you compare the glitz and glamour of Beverly Hills to a run down, rat infested housing tenement in East Los Angeles?

Can any of us claim to live in a Christian society when we see Frosty or Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer in a Christmas crèche instead of the baby Jesus?

Just like John the Baptist, we are still living in a pre-Christian era. We still need to be transformed into communities that are Christ's body and that live out the love and grace he so freely gave.

We may still live in a pre-Christian era, but one thing is different about us as compared to John and the people of his day. We are post resurrection people. The message we can offer today because Jesus was born, lived and died is that salvation has already been accomplished—it is not up to us to save anyone—Christ did that on the cross over 2000 years ago.

Facing this truth is what sets us free. Facing this truth is what enables *us* to be modern day John the Baptists. **WE** are to prepare the way today. The question is, are we willing? You will probably stand out in the crowd and you will probably look foolish and be thrown out of the city council meeting. But, we don't have to preach a baptism of repentance like John did.

What we have to offer, through Jesus Christ, is a new life, a hope and love that transcend all human experience.

That, my friends, is what we prepare for during Advent. We are not only preparing our hearts to welcome the newborn babe in the manger, but we are also preparing ourselves for an event that did and can transform all of human history.

We ARE the John the Baptists of our day.

There are ten words you can press upon your heart and add to your list of John the Baptist vocabulary words as you prepare the way in our pre-Christian world. Those words are:

Christ is born. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

Say those words with me now. Christ is born, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. These are the words we need to share in our still pre-Christian era.

I read a poem in a book titled "Inside the Soul of a New Generation" (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1996, 106-107) from a Gen-Xer--that generation several generations younger than most of us. This young poet, hungry for God, explains what this pre-Christian culture is looking for. These are his words:

"Do you know, do you understand that you represent Jesus to me?

Do you know, do you understand that when you treat me with gentleness, it raises the question in my mind that maybe he is gentle, too?

Maybe he isn't someone who laughs when I am hurt. Do you know, do you understand that when you listen to my questions and you don't laugh, I think, "What if Jesus is interested in me, too?"

Do you know, do you understand that when I hear you talk about arguments and conflict and scars from your past that I think, "Maybe I am just a regular person instead of a bad, no-good, little girl who deserves abuse?"

If you care, I think maybe he cares -- and then there's this flame of hope that burns inside of me, and for a while, I am afraid to breathe because it might go out.

Do you know, do you understand that your words are his words? Your face, his face to someone like me? Please be who

you say you are. Please, God, don't let this be another trick.
Please let this be real. Please.

Do you know, do you understand that you represent Jesus to me? (Tim Celek and Dieter Zander)."

Are you ready to prepare the way? Are you ready to be a modern day John the Baptist in our community and in our world? Do you understand that you represent Jesus to every one you meet?

As we come to the Lord's Table this morning, I invite you to strip away all your pretenses, all your pre-conceived notions of what it means to be Christ in the world to others. Allow Jesus, this morning to prepare his way in *your* heart. Start fresh from this day forward to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

May the love of our Lord Jesus Christ so fill your heart that you will be the voice crying out in the wilderness of our world today. Amen.