

As I was thinking about this morning's text on the day I wrote the sermon, a song came to my mind. I was in the shower and I started to sing: *Prepare the ye the way of the Lord...* This song was stuck in my head the whole day. And it made me think. **What do these words really mean?** We'll try to answer this question today and see how our findings can influence, and perhaps turn around or change our everyday lives.

I used the words turn around and change intentionally because they are a very significant part of today's message. But let us start in the beginning. Today is the second Sunday of Advent. I need someone to translate this word for us, to help us to understand what does the word Advent mean. Yes, Advent means COMING.

It is already starting to make a little bit more sense. We're in the season where we're preparing for somebody's coming. And John the Baptist very plainly explains to us who's is coming. It is the Lord. And most of us know that the Advent season are the four Sundays before Christmas when we're preparing for the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, the son of God who came into this world in human body. Jesus was that word that became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

And in today's Gospel reading we hear that in the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor and Herod king and Annas high priest etc.... the word of God come to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. Isn't it amazing? The word of God came, remember Advent = coming; the word of God came to John. It all began with the coming of the word of God. The same word of God through which the world was created. The same word of God that became flesh. The same word of God we hear today. (pause)

And when John heard this word of God he went into all the regions around the Jordan, that's where he lived, proclaiming a baptism of repentance which is METANOIA in Greek, and we'll come back to this word, but John was proclaiming baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (pause)

Now remember why he was doing it? He was doing it first because the word of God came to him and told him to do so, and because he knew that this word of God is coming in the

human form for the whole world, to make his dwelling among the human race, and John realized, that this event is soooo huge, that he'll have to tell everyone about it. He realized that this event was so incredibly important that everyone should get ready and be 100% prepared for this miraculous coming of the Lord.

John went into all the region around the Jordan proclaiming: Prepare the way of the Lord, for he is coming. Make his paths straight for he is coming. And every valley shall be filled for he is coming, and every mountain shall be made low, for he is coming, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, for he is coming and all flesh shall see the salvation of God, for he, Jesus Christ, the son of the living God is coming. And nothing will be the same ever again, he will change everything, and he will make everything new.

Prepare yourself for the coming of the Lord, was the message of John the Baptist. Well he certainly got the attention of the people; he certainly caused enough of ruckus, he certainly put everything within him into preparing the way. **Now what do these words mean to us today?** We know that Jesus already came, and that despite the repentance campaign of John the Baptist Christ wasn't welcomed like a king, he wasn't accepted as the one to save his people, his way wasn't made smooth. **And so is this message even relevant to us people of 21st century?**

Of course it is. It is as important as it ever was. The fact that Jesus was born over 2.000 years ago doesn't change a bit on the fact that he is still coming into our lives as our personal Savior. The message of John the Baptist is still very needed in our lives, for just as it was 2.000 years ago Christ is not welcomed in our world as a king, he is not accepted as the one to save his people, his way isn't made smooth. The exact opposite is true; this world does everything to silence this new born king, to take him out of our lives, our hearts. Just think about the world we live in. The world that is for a long time now described as secular, worldly or material.

It is in this kind of world that we hear the words of John the Baptist spoken to all of us today saying: Prepare the way of the Lord. And to do so one has to start with himself. John proclaimed the baptism of repentance, metanoia which means to turn away from something or could be translated as change of mind. John says to us: turn around, change your ways, your thinking, your inner being, everything that is separating you from God, from your loved ones,

every selfish ambition, every sinful thought, every angry intention, change it, turn away from it, repent, for the Lord is coming. (pause)

So now that you know what to do, good luck, have a blessed Advent and a very Merry Christmas..... ☺ Amen. Yeah, if it would be only so easy... right? Repent, turn around, change your ways. It's not that easy, but at same time it's not impossible. Millions of people have done it; their lives **were** turned around, changed, rebuilt. But how, you're probably asking yourself.

Well the first step is to recognize that there is a problem in my life, that if I am on my own, sooner or later I'll be heading the wrong direction. The beginning of repentance is realizing that there is sin, spelled sIn in my life that separates me from my God, from my loved ones, from my friends. The beginning of repentance is to name this sin, is to identify the enemy, to bring things to light. For only when we do so we'll be able **to be** saved.

Now did you realize that I said we'll be able **to be** saved. See, if I don't know that I'm sick I will not go to doctor. But when I know something is wrong, the first thing I'm going to do is to make an appointment. But it is not I that cures me, it is the doctor. And it works in the same way with repentance and God's grace and forgiveness. It is not for us to save ourselves, that's not within our own ability. We can only **be** saved. Salvation is a gift. John says: And all flesh, all human beings shall see the salvation of God. Not because of what they've done but because of what God has done, and still does.

Let's say your swimming and you start to drown and someone throws you a life saver and when you reach out and grab it very tight, you can't really say that you saved yourself, but you have to say I was saved. That's the way it works with repentance and God's gift of grace. (pause) But at the same time we have to admit that if we wouldn't reach out and grabbed that life saver it would be our own fault and we'd be guilty for drowning. And so once again repentance is not a deed that we have to do to save ourselves; repentance is a gift of God through which we're saved.

God is sending his one and only son Jesus Christ, into this world, into our lives, so that this world and our lives can be changed once for all. The Lord is coming, prepare him the way. Open your hearts and minds and listen what he has to say. Stop for a little while, turn around and let him lead you, let him heal you, let him make you new. (pause)

Remember we started with God's spell song: *Prepare ye the way of the Lord...* and we asked ourselves a question: **What do these words really mean?** Well we found out that preparing the way of the Lord has to start in our hearts and in our lives, there is no other way. But remember it doesn't have to be so difficult, God will do it if we let him.

Amen