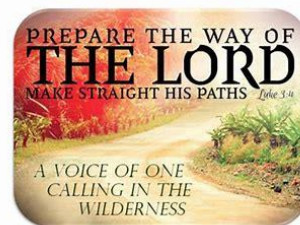


## Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2020

This is the second Sunday in Advent – a time to prepare the way in our lives for Christ's coming and the new beginnings he offers us as we repent, find forgiveness and power through his Spirit to serve him in the world.

[Enya - O come, O come Emmanuel - Bing video](#)



### **Prayer:**

God of tenderness and comfort,  
As we come to worship today  
Speak words of peace that calm the storms in our lives,  
Ease our troubles and heal our wounds.  
Help us as we worship, to so find you in our lives that we may confidently proclaim your good news.  
Straighten our paths and help us to serve your people  
That your glory may be revealed, even in us.  
Amen

Andy Braunston (alt'd)

### **Comfort for God's People Isaiah 40:1-11 NIV**

**40** Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

<sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup> A voice of one calling:

"In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD;  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low;  
the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

<sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together.  
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

<sup>6</sup> A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?"

"All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

<sup>7</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them.  
Surely the people are grass.

<sup>8</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

<sup>9</sup> You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain.

You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"

<sup>10</sup> See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm.

See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

<sup>11</sup> He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

### **John the Baptist Prepares the Way**

**1** The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, <sup>2</sup> as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way”

<sup>3</sup> “a voice of one calling in the wilderness,

‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

<sup>4</sup> And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. <sup>6</sup> John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup> I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

### **Meditation: (from Magdalene’s blog)**

John the Baptist’s older parents finally had the baby boy they had dreamed of and prayed for. Imagine their joy. Imagine their delirious, unforeseen joy!

Then imagine dinner, maybe 16 years down the road.....

In walks John, a surly teenager in a rather unusual outfit, even for the year 16 AD. His mother speaks.

“No. No. Not that thing again. If I’ve told you once I’ve told you a hundred times. I will not have that stinky camel-skin thing at my dinner table.”

“Mother, I’m a prophet. Like Elijah. Haven’t you ever heard of Elijah?”

“And look—Zechariah look. He has fleas. Fleas! They’re getting all over the tablecloth.”

Zechariah tries to intercede: “Son, really, I think your mother...”

“Dad, I’m sick and tired of you two not getting it. Don’t you see? This is the way he’s described in scripture!” [2 Kings 1:8].

“I don’t care, young man! I want that nasty camel-pelt out of my dining room!” John leaves and returns a few minutes later in a traditional man’s robe, and slumps down at the table. His mother puts a plate of lamb and pita bread and cucumbers in front of him, but he just pushes it around on the plate.

“What’s wrong now?” sighs Elizabeth.

“Do you have any locusts?” John asks.

It takes a moment for Elizabeth to find the words. “Locusts? You mean—as in, those horrible, buzzing, flying things that are the stuff of biblical plagues? No John. No, I don’t have any locusts.”

John looks hopefully around the kitchen. “How about some wild honey?”

Well, Zechariah and Elizabeth can’t claim they weren’t warned. The angel told them pretty specifically what they could expect in their son—that he would be great, that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit, and that he would prepare the way of the Lord. They were also told that John would pretty much be channelling the prophet Elijah, thus the unusual garb and eating habits.

John is trying to help the people to prepare, to get ready for an encounter with God, which, as it happens, is much the same thing we are trying to do in this Advent season. We are using this time to prepare for an encounter with God. How do we do that, precisely?

It’s easy to think John had some kind of advantage. Which makes sense, his being Jesus’ cousin and all—according to Luke’s gospel, that is. I mean, they probably played out together. Mary and Elizabeth and the two boys, going to the parks in the hill country of Judea? Doesn’t it make sense that they grew up knowing one another, at least a little bit?

Even so, I don’t think that knowing which card games Jesus liked, or how to dribble a football past him necessarily helped John in the work God was commissioning him to do. Being related to Jesus did not, for John, equal “having a relationship with Jesus.”

John had it right, out in the Jordan River, surrounded by all those people looking to be baptized. We prepare for an encounter with God through repentance.

Nevertheless, Advent is a season whose focus is preparation, readiness, and it has a joyful flavour to it. We all tend to come to the word “repentance” with our own history, and images, and associations. Repentance is a big part of Advent, and to understand that, we have to understand the root meaning of the word. Repentance is from the Greek word *metanoia*, and *metanoia* means, literally, turning around. Turn around, John says, or you will not see

Jesus when he gets here. Turn around, I have something very cool to show you. Turn around, or you will miss the good stuff.

‘Prepare the way of the Lord’ and ‘Repent’ describe a moment of possibility, of leaving behind something that is burdensome to you, and turning around to see what new thing Jesus is going to show you.

Jesus’ unsettling cousin John had a message for the people of ancient Judea and he has the same message for us today, in our Advent season of 2020. That message is “turn around.” So, we need to do some pondering. What, exactly, do we need to turn away from in order to be able to turn toward Jesus? When you turn around, you turn your back to one thing even as you turn to face another. As we prepare the way of the Lord in our hearts, in our lives, what are we turning from as we turn toward Jesus? It’s a question filled with joy, and possibility, and leaving something burdensome behind. A thought and challenge for the week ahead.

### **In Our World’s Wilderness**

Lord God

Be with us in our world’s wilderness  
As we long for meaning and value,  
As we search for you without always knowing how,  
as we cry out for wholeness and healing.

Lord God,

Be with us in our heart’s wilderness,  
As we strive to hear your Word,  
Brought to us by prophets and outsiders;  
Calling us to change.

Lord God, forgive us:

When we prefer the wilderness and isolation  
To the presence of your people;  
When we prefer to walk our own way,  
Rather than the new direction to which you call us.

Lord God,

Help us to accept your forgiveness,  
To be willing to change direction,  
And in you see our new beginning,  
Living the Good News of the Gospel.

Amen



Andy Braunston (alt'd)

*Please add your prayers for others you wish to pray for today . . .*

## **The Lord's Prayer**

### **Holy Communion**

**As we come to take bread and wine, we remember that forgiveness and new life is possible because of Jesus.**

[Here is bread • Praise Group - YouTube](#)

Here IS bread and here IS wine and Christ IS with us.

On the night before he died, Jesus took bread and wine and gave thanks to God. So we give thanks:

We praise you Father for the sacrifice of Jesus, making possible the new relationship with you. Thank you for your amazing love and grace. Help us as we receive this bread and wine to find strength and love to live for you and share your love with others.

Amen

Jesus took the bread and broke it saying, 'This is my body, given for you. Take it and eat it and as you do, remember me.'

After supper he took the wine and said, 'This is a sign of the new relationship with God made possible at the cost of my death. Take it and drink it and as you do, remember me.'

Prayer

Thank you, Lord God, for forgiving us, for feeding us and for filling us. Help us to go peaceful to serve you in the world. Amen

[Go Peaceful reflection - Bing video](#)

