

Mark 1:1-8

"John the Baptist, Wild and Radical"

The advent season is a season of hope, of anticipation, of promise, of joy, and of faith. We come into this season with many things on our hearts and minds, and many hopes and dreams for the coming new year. We have had a year of life that has passed, where there have been moments of joy, of sadness, of peace, and of love. We come into the advent season with all of these things. We come into a time that is now, right before us and with us in the present.

The readings this morning point to a time a place where all of these emotions and feelings are very real. Our two main readings that I will focus on, the reading in Isaiah and the reading in Mark, both point towards the future, they point towards a coming messiah, a coming hope and messenger of good news that would radically transform the world that we live in.

The prophet Isaiah spoke in a time when Israel believed that they were being cast aside, punished for their sins. In our Isaiah reading we have the prophet telling the people that indeed they will be redeemed and that they will not have to suffer any more. The Israelites had just been conquered by the Babylonians, and they had been cast away into a foreign land. They had been ripped from their homes, their places of safety, and instead taken to a place where they did not know anyone. They believed they were being punished for forgetting God and forgetting to glorify God in all that they do.

But in this doom and gloom of the Israelites the prophet tells them that they are not to worry. They are to prepare the way for the coming Lord and be ready for the when the Lord returns to take them home. God has not forgotten the people nor will he allows the people to be cast aside any longer. The Lord is coming to take them home and restore the people to righteousness.

In our Mark reading, we have the story of the one preparing the way for Christ. The gospel of Mark takes a different step in preparing the story of Christ. It dispenses with the long genealogies of Christ that are found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. It passes by the language of incarnation found in John. It gets right to the point. It is a simple, radical way of getting to the point, getting to the point of the coming of the Christ.

The point I believe that Mark is trying to get to in his telling of the gospel is that Christ is indeed coming. Christ is coming and will radically redefine the lives of God's people, of all people. The messenger will be sent to prepare the way so that people will know that indeed Jesus Christ is the son of God.

Today, using these readings, I would like to look at the one who is preparing the way for Christ, John the Baptist, with his wild and radical ways, and look how we can incorporate the traits of John of the Baptist into our own lives in this season of advent. I believe that John the Baptist is a key figure in the story of Christ, for through him part of the great story of Christ is fulfilled, giving us assurance that indeed Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of humankind.

John the Baptist would have been a very interesting person to meet on the street, if he would go down a street. The scriptures tell us that this was a man who wore the hair of a camel with a leather belt, and locusts and wild honey. He was a true wilderness man in his time, for he lived on the bare essentials alone. He was probably so good at living in the wilderness with hardly anything that in would make those people on Survivor and all of those wilderness survival shows look like amateurs. John the Baptist lived his life boldly.

John the Baptist lived like a prophet would have in the days of the prophets. The prophets were a people that did live this bare lifestyle and would do seemingly strange things in their

lives, so that that other people would listen to what they have to say. You would probably at least pay more attention to a person who was attracting your attention. They also lived in such a way so that in the sacrifices of the finer things they could give glory to God and honor God with their giving up of their comforts. It was their offering to God.

John the Baptist followed in the spirit of the prophets. He was a man who went out to the wilderness and he was so strange that people were drawn to him, to hear his message of the coming Christ. He proclaimed a message that the Son of God was coming, and in his wild and radical ways of life people would listen to him.

I often wonder what it would be like to have a conversation with John the Baptist. I highly doubt that he would sit down with me for coffee at Starbucks. I would probably have to go to him somewhere under a tree in the wilderness, probably near a river where he would be baptizing people. Our snack would consist of that honey and locust, but I would leave the locust for him to be polite.

What would this man say for me? What wisdom could I gain? I believe that he would tell me, and all of us that we can indeed prepare the way for Christ in our own lives. We can be radical in our own ways in our preparations, in our actions, and in our living. We can be wild in the hope that is coming and excited for the new day that would be upon. Yes, I believe we would be able to learn something from John the Baptist.

Isaiah was telling the people to prepare the way for the coming Messiah by telling the people to prepare the roads and hills and valleys. John the Baptist was preparing the way for Christ by baptizing the people in the river and telling them that indeed the Christ was coming. Taking the advice from John the Baptist, what can we do to prepare the way?

In our culture we spend quite a bit of time preparing for the season. Last Sunday we prepared our church by decorating it so that we can give glory to God and prepare the building for the coming Christ child. Kristina and I spent this week preparing our home for the season, by purchasing a Christmas tree and setting decorations. We spend our time, especially in this part of the month, preparing for Christmas. It is what we do, it is expected of us, it's that time of year.

Yet I don't think that Isaiah and John the Baptist exactly had these ideas in mind when preparing the way for Christ. John the Baptist didn't exactly deck the halls and bring in the yule log and boar for Christmas dinner. I believe that Isaiah and John the Baptist were looking more towards the spiritual side of things. I believe that they wanted us to take time and prepare ourselves spiritually for the coming of the Christ child.

In our consumeristic culture we tend to think more of the material preparations, the shopping, the cooking, the decorating, rather than the spiritual preparations that we should be making for the coming of Christ. I am perfectly fine with the material preparations, but not at the expense of our spiritual preparations. We need to spend time together in the church, in community, serving others, reading the Bible and countless other ways to prepare ourselves spiritually for the coming of the most important child in all of human history. No other person has had the impact on our world like Jesus Christ. We need to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ child in our hearts, so that we can receive the fullest and most wonderful gift that we can ever imagine, the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ.

But you have to notice one thing in all of this preparation, and that is the preparation was not just for themselves. They weren't preparing themselves, but they were preparing other people as well. Isaiah was telling the people what to do for the Messiah, and John the Baptist was baptizing people. They were proclaiming a message to the nations, so that others would know

that Christ coming. They were not hermits alone in their preparation, they were very involved with other people in this time of preparation.

Preparing the way so that others might know the love and Spirit of Christ is exactly what we must do. We must not only prepare ourselves, but help other people in their preparation for the coming Christ child. We do this by lending a helping hand to a neighbor, donating food to charities, giving clothing and gifts to those who cannot afford them on their own.

We must also prepare others spiritually by being willing to share our faith, share the gospel message, and share the love of God with other people. We must be willing to pray others in this time, especially when they are discouraged in this season of joy. We must be willing to step outside of our comfort zone to share the gospel. It is a joy to serve other people this way and we will experience the joy of Christ in our own lives by preparing the way for Jesus Christ.

In this season of preparation, think about what you would talk with John the Baptist about. Think about how you would prepare the way for Christ to come into your life spiritually. Think about how you would prepare the way for Christ to come into the lives of others spiritually as well. It is in this season of joy that we must be willing to prepare the way, just like John the Baptist and Isaiah did so many years ago.

They did not do this alone, for they had God on their side in their preparations. Likewise in our preparations. Whenever you might get discouraged in your preparations, turn to God in prayer, lift up your concerns, and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you and move you in a way so that you can be prepared. We have been given so much in this season, it is our turn to prepare the way for Christ so that others might have life eternal and that we might have life eternal. In the coming Christ child's name. Amen.