

Daily Discipleship

Second Sunday of Advent (C) – Luke 3:1-6

Imperatives of Discipleship – Prepare!

Focus Question: What are you preparing for this Advent season?

word of life

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” Luke 3:4 (NRSV)

Read Luke 3:1-6

Each Advent season, regardless of which of the four gospels is being read and studied, we see the person of John the Baptist.

1. *What do you know about John the Baptist?*
2. *If you have time, look over the descriptions of John the Baptist found in Matthew 3:1-12, Mark 1:1-8, and John 1:19-28. Note similarities and differences in the readings.*

John is often known for his radical lifestyle, rugged dress, and stark diet. But the significance of John the Baptist is found in his message.

The writer of Luke carefully gives the political context into which John (and later Jesus) comes into the story. (We see a similar contextual grounding in Luke’s account of the Christmas story in Luke 2:1). The political and religious leaders are named (Luke 3:1-2) and are significant, for they indicate the various forces in place at the time. (Many of them will be heard from again at Jesus’ trial and crucifixion.) Israel is a vassal state, forced to live under Roman occupancy. The high priesthood is also largely under Roman control. Anyone proclaiming the message of the coming kingdom of God would have to deal with the political realities of the day.

3. *How does the context impact the message?*
4. *What political or religious forces are present today as we strive to share the Good News of the coming of the kingdom of God?*

It is in this time of political oppression and foreign rule that “the word of God came to John” (vs. 2). This is a common phrase in the call of a prophet. (See Jeremiah 1:1-2.) The prophet is confronted with God’s message and compelled to share that message with God’s people.

5. *In what ways does the “word of God come to us” today?*

John is a messenger; and like the prophets before him, his message is one of preparation and repentance. His words echo the prophet Isaiah – “prepare the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight” (Isaiah 40:3). This is challenging news – changes are called for. But it is also good news, for “all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” (Luke 3:6 NRSV)

The Greek word *repentance* can be literally translated “to turn one’s mind around.” It has less to do with confession and more to do with change in life and perspective. John Westerhoff, in his book *A Pilgrim People* (p. 46) writes:

To repent is to change our perception, to recognize that the reign of God is at hand, that life in the world to come has already begun. To repent is not to lament our sins or be sorry for the evil we’ve done; it is to have faith, to perceive life and our lives in a new way.

Something great is about to happen. Someone great is coming. Repent.! Prepare! Get ready!

word among us

The overarching theme for the *Daily Discipleship* material this season is *The Imperatives of Discipleship*. When we think of imperatives, we often think of obligatory commands that we **have** to do. As children at the dinner table, we were told the imperative, “Eat your vegetables.” As we go through airport security, we are commanded, “Take off your shoes.”

We often chafe at such demands and view them as limiting our freedoms and forcing us to do things we don’t want to do. The imperatives feel like laws we have to follow, whether we want to or not.

Examples abound. A coach tells the football team in the scorching heat of the summer, “Get ready now, and you’ll know the thrill of victory in the future.” A vocal coach works with the singer in order to experience the joy of the performance. A family cleans and decorates the house in order to enjoy the sights and sounds of the season.

1. *What are other examples of imperatives in our daily lives?*

The imperatives of discipleship are a bit different. They expand rather than limit our freedoms. They lead us to life in the fullest, rather than restrict our lives. They point us to a future filled with hope and promise.

2. *How does the theme “The Imperatives of Discipleship” feel to you?*
3. *Does Jesus give us imperatives? Explain your answer.*

The message of John the Baptist is filled with imperatives: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” John calls for preparation and repentance, not to limit the possibilities of those who hear and follow, but to expand them to know and see more fully the wonderful future that is coming.

As disciples of Christ, we hear the imperatives of discipleship. We hear John’s message: “Prepare the way of the Lord.” We ask God to clean our lives and our spiritual houses, getting rid of old grudges and patterns of living that clutter our existence and limit our vision. We pray for a clean and a right spirit within us, so that we might experience anew and ever more fully Christ’s coming.

And we respond to the imperative from John – “**prepare** the way of the Lord” – with our imperative of prayer: “Amen! **Come**, Lord Jesus!”

4. *How will you prepare for the way of the Lord?*
5. *What other changes in your life are in order?*

Prayer

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Cleanse our hearts that we might prepare for your coming among us. Amen

Dig Deeper

Malachi 3:1-4

Isaiah 40: 1-5

last word

This week, note ways you prepare for Christmas and for Christ’s coming.



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Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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2 Advent C Page 2 of 2