

## **Repair the Way of the Lord**

Mark 1:1-8            Crossroads Christian Church  
Isaiah 40:1-11       Caseyville, IL  
Advent 2B            Dec. 7, 2014

Our family has always enjoyed the musical Godspell. It was a retelling of the Gospel set in modern times—well, sort of modern—it's set in New York City in the 1970s, when polyester and tie-dye reigned supreme. It opens with the character who plays John the Baptist blowing a ram's horn—a shofar—and calling people to get ready for Christ's coming, with the song, "Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord."

In our family, when we sang that song back in the 70s, we sang it loudly and joyfully. When our son John, who is now a mature 40-something, was a toddler, he'd sing it loudly and joyfully, too. Only we discovered that he was singing "Repair Ye the way of the Lord." It was one of those cute childhood mistakes that have a lot of truth in them.

So here it is, the Second Sunday of Advent, and we get ready to hear the Christmas story. We have heard the Gospel message over and over again. We have seen many Christmas programs before. We've been caroling before, and we've been to Christmas Eve services before. We have heard sermons from many different preachers, and sat through membership classes. It may seem like it's nothing new to us. So what is there to prepare?

But wait! There's always something new in the stories of Advent and Christmas, because they create newness in themselves. We need to get past the sense of "more of the same old stuff" because this message is always new. God is always calling us to prepare the way for the coming of Christ into our lives. It's never the same old story, because there's always something different about it, something new about it, something compelling and challenging about it. Every year it calls us to put away that which is old and tired, and put on that which is new and from God. And every year we're each a different person, and that means we can always discover a new connection with that old, new story.

Each Gospel introduces Christ in a different way. Matthew gives us the genealogy, to show that Jesus was a descendant of King David, for that's what the Hebrew Scriptures said the Messiah would be. Then he tells about Joseph's struggle to do the right thing by Mary; points us to the wise men following the star to Bethlehem; and then of the great tragedy that happened when Herod perceived this tiny baby as a threat to his own power. Luke tells us of Elizabeth's joy and Mary's joy in carrying special babies; of the census and the inn; of the manger and the shepherds. John doesn't give us a story of Jesus' birth, but gives us a magnificent poem about God's creative Word taking on flesh

and dwelling among us. Mark, the Gospel we heard this morning, begins in a different way. He offers the good news of Jesus Christ, and then he immediately switches to John bringing what sounds like bad news. "Repent! If you've been doing bad things, quit it and do the good. If you've been unjust, be fair. If you've stolen, cheated or extorted, pay it back. Why? Because God's special Day is at hand. Prepare the way. (Or as my son said, Repair the way.) You are living in a wilderness of sin. Straighten the path, build the road, so that the Lord might come." No baby in a manger for Mark, just an urgent plea, a demand even, that we experience radical conversion. Why? Because we might not otherwise recognize the Christ who has come into our midst. We might not follow him. We might not love and serve him, if we are busy serving other masters.

For John the Baptist, the word Repent didn't just mean the little repentance we sometimes do, when we pray that we're sorry for yelling at our spouse or kids, or gossiping about a neighbor. It means to do a 180—to change the basic way that you live your life—to start obeying God instead of our own desires. It's a basic change of course, discovering a whole new direction; going from being lost to being found.

I'm a guy, so I'd rather wander around lost for awhile than stop and ask for directions. We have a GPS system that can tell me when to turn to get to the place I'm supposed to be going, if I remember to plug it in. It's impressive technology if you use it—being in touch w/a satellite in orbit and running all the data through a computer. But I'm also aware that although we have global positioning systems, I need even more a God positioning system—something that will tell me where I am in relationship to the will of the One who created me and called me to be a Christian. And that's what John the Baptist was calling for. The signals come not from a satellite but from God. They're not interpreted by a computer, but by our conscience. I need to hear the call of John the Baptist. I need to prepare and repair the way of the Lord. I can do this in prayer and Bible study; in giving generously of my time, talent and treasure to God's work; in trying to live so that justice and peace are lights that shine more brightly in the darkness. That's how can I prepare the way of the Lord. Only then can my heart be ready to understand the power, the reality, the grace, the transformation that can come when we let Jesus the Christ into our lives.

I think, also, that God wants us to repair the way of the Lord by the way we act in the world. The protests in Ferguson and St. Louis remind us that many people feel alienated and oppressed. Many people, of all skin color, feel overwhelmed by economic pressures. They fear job loss; they fear foreclosure; they're exhausted by working

multiple jobs just to try and make ends meet. Many people just plain feel lost and alone, with broken relationships. Many are oppressed by their own addictions. Many are betrayed by their own bodies, and are losing their physical freedom. Many are caught up in consumerism, and try to buy their way to meaning in life, but wonder why their hearts are hollow.

So what can we do to repair the way of the Lord for the hurting, suffering people around us? We can pray for them, of course. We can meet immediate needs by supporting food banks and organizations like Beacon. We can vote for and work for systemic change through our voting and involvement in agencies that can bring change. And we can listen to, and pray for, these hurting people. That's how we can repair the way of the Lord. Amen.

By Michael E. Dixon