

## **Preparing**

Hope is Born: Part 2 “Preparing”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – December 6th, 2020

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent

**Readings:** Isaiah 40:1-11; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

**Reflection:** Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

**Greeting:** A voice cries out: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

**Lighting the Advent Candle:** The second Sunday of Advent we light the candle of peace in each step of the journey. “Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.” (Isaiah 40:1 NRSV\*)  
*The second candle is lit.*

**Prayer:** Eternal God, in your providence you made all ages a preparation for the kingdom of your Son. Make ready our hearts for the brightness of your glory and the fullness of your blessing in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 85

*To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Psalm. Lord, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin. Selah Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps. (Psalm 85:1-2,8-13 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 85 and hear of peace and salvation. That God’s favor has been and will be with his people. That the Lord will help his people once again. That a path for the Lord is made in righteousness. How do you prepare for the good God brings? How do you help to make a path for God’s glory? How do you share God’s steadfast love and faithfulness?

**Prayer:** Oh Lord, prepare our hearts in this season of advent. Bring us closer to you in all that we are. Help us to remember our Savior born into this world so that we may know your great love for us. Help us this season as we find hope in you. Help us to prepare our hearts for your steadfast love and faithfulness. Bring us together in your joy and your mercy, that we may born anew into your grace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Isaiah chapter 40, verses 1 through 11.

*Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep. (Isaiah 40:1-11 NRSV\*)*

Our next reading is from 2 Peter chapter 3, verses 8 through 15a.

*But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. (2 Peter 3:8-15a NRSV\*)*

Our final reading is from Mark, chapter 1, verses 1 through 8.

*The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out*

*to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

*(Mark 1:1-8 NRSV\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Our second message in our Advent series, Hope is Born, is about preparing. And I think that preparing is an important thing for us to think about, especially in a time where hope may feel far off. The act of preparing oneself for hope and joy helps to create hope and joy. And so, in these difficult and troubling times, I feel that preparing for hope is more important than ever. We get a picture of this idea of preparing in our readings for today. In Second Peter, Peter is talking about all the things that are coming. The Day of the Lord, where everything will pass away and all we are made new. That we are waiting for a new heaven and a new earth, waiting for a place where righteousness is at home. What shall we do? We should be found at peace, regarding the patience of the Lord as salvation. Being prepared for that newness by being at peace and welcoming the transformation. Not waiting just sitting idly by but doing what we can so that we may bring about God's kingdom here on Earth. We do what we can to be able to share hope. Peter says the Lord is patient not wanting any to perish but all the come to repentance. Which means that we must do our part to make sure that all know that that is open to them. And the best way is to share the hope that we have in God. And one of the best ways we can highlight that is the hope that we are given in Jesus Christ.

We see this again in Isaiah. And we see Isaiah echoed in our Gospel reading. Isaiah speaks of comfort, that the Lord is still there, and the Lord will still redeem his people. And we get the line that is echoed in both Isaiah, and then repeated in Mark. "A voice cries out in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Not that people should wait by but prepare. When asked, "what shall I cry?" Lift up and do not fear. Cry out "here is your God!" That God is coming with might to lead his people, to shepherd them. A message of hope and of how to bring about that hope and that joy. So that the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all the people shall see it together. And we get another picture of preparing in our Gospel reading. We have the words of Isaiah, about John baptizing people in the wilderness. A baptism of repentance, of forgiving of sins, giving people a fresh start and a new hope. And John says that somebody better than this is coming after him. Someone who's not going to baptize with water like he's been doing but somebody that will baptize with the Holy Spirit, that will give what you need for true life. But the interesting thing is that John could just yell out this message and say you've just go to wait and nothing more. But no. John prepares the people by baptizing them first with water, bringing them into the idea that their sins can be forgiven. Washing them clean so that they can turn away from the life they've been living and turn to God. Preparing them for what happens next. I find this interesting because in

that, John is giving the people joy, baptizing people out in the river. He is giving people hope. Hope in the current and hope in the future. And that hope that he delivers in the moment is what enables them to have hope in the future. That they aren't just sitting there going, well John said something's coming so I guess we wait for it, but saying I've already been given a gift but a bigger gift is coming. And they prepare for that bigger gift because of the joy in the hope they have received, being given peace as well. That they have the peace inside them that they know that God is with them. That they have been forgiven and they can await this bigger thing to come. And I am reminded that each stage of our hope journey is enabling the next. That each hope that we get gives us the peace that we need to be able to be patient to wait for the next stage. That each thing we do that gets us through to the next enables us to more readily accept what's coming. And to eagerly anticipate it and to prepare.

I have to say that I was deeply influenced this week by Simon. I made sure to get his permission since I would be talking about him today. Because Simon has been very eager to repeat that the thing about Christmas isn't getting gifts or putting up the tree, but Christmas is about friends and family. And you know I really thought about that and how right he is. Now some might say "oh well, but the reason for the season" and I have to hold up my hand and say wait. What is it that we talk about on Christmas? The joy of a family. Being able to share that joy with others, with friends. The hope given to people in the celebration of a new family. And I think in some ways that short and simple statement of his has helped me to think about the way I want to prepare my heart for the hope that is Christmas. Because Advent is a season of preparation. That it is waiting, but it's also preparing ourselves to be ready for that joy. And even though we know that Christ has already been born into the world, we celebrate that joy coming into the world because of everything that it signifies in our lives. That it signifies God's love for us. That God came to walk among us. To live among us. To deliver us by coming into our lives as a child, to be part of that little family, to grow and to learn and to give hope. And so, part of our preparation is preparing ourselves for that love and for that joy. But part of that means that we create joy and love along the way. Because I think about all the things that we do to get ourselves ready. We put up the tree and we set up the decorations and a nativity is put up. And the act of doing those things creates joy. I know I get peace from sitting by the tree with the kids and knowing that it's a season full of love and caring, a reminder of God's love. That I can sit and take that time just to be. That it's okay that I can be at peace with everything around me.

I come back to Simon's words that it is about friends and family because it's about sharing that peace and that joy and that hope with others. Because in every act of getting ready for Christ coming into the world, coming into our hearts, emerging again in our lives, sparking that idea of hope and love, forgiveness and mercy, of grace, bringing all that together once again. And it creates hope. I think about it when I'm doing anything related to Christmas. Wrapping gifts and baking cookies. It gives me the joy that God has given me these pleasures to be able to celebrate his love in this way. And that if others are down, I can give them hope

by letting them know that I am here and that I care. Because I know that Christ is there for me and that Christ cares. That Christ came into this world not to bring us down but to lift us up. Not to make us scared but to give us hope. Not so we'd be afraid, but so that we could walk knowing that we have life in him. So, one of the ways that I prepare is by sharing the good news with others. That Christ is there for you. Christ is there for all. A sign of hope. A sign that God is with us and that the light cannot be put out. A reminder that there's always something more for us. That there is always more yet to come.

To me, Advent is about celebrating all the joys that are to come. Be it joys in this life, or the next. Be it the joy of Christ being born into this world, be it the joy of God's steadfast love enduring through every age or be at that final joy. They're all united by living a life in Christ and finding hope in that life. And so, do whatever it is you need to do to prepare your heart. Whatever it is you need to do to prepare yourself to be ready for peace, to be ready for hope, to be ready for joy, to be ready for love. Whatever it is that brings you to be the voice crying out "God is with us." Be it in the words that we say, the gifts that we give, the songs that we sing, let all that we do be dedicated to the one who gives us life and gives us hope. Because in every act of dedication, that we prepare ourselves for that love we bring love to the world. And in everything that we do to prepare ourselves for hope in Christ, we bring hope to the world. So, let us prepare to do all that we can for the Father who loves us, the Son who redeems us, for the Spirit that guides us. In this season of Advent, let us always be preparing for hope that we may give hope, share love, and that we may live in peace. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** Lord Jesus Christ, you are the way of peace. Com into the brokenness of our lives and our land with your healing love. Help us to be willing to bow before you in true repentance, and to bow to one another in real forgiveness. By the fire of your Holy Spirit, melt our hard hearts and consume the pride and prejudice which separate us. Fill us, O Lord, with your perfect love, which casts out our fear, and bind us together in that unity which you share with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** We go forth now in as a people of hope. We go with the blessings of the Father, in the peace of the Son, in communion with the Holy Spirit. Until we meet again.  
**Amen.**

**Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Eric Veach	Cathy Devall
Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Nancy Sowers	Cindy Cisney
Patti Corder & Crew	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins
Ronnie & Elaine Carlen	Don Stewart	Anne Winkler Heinrichs	Bill Gilbert
Michael & Makenzie Reynolds		Ronnie Winstead	John Millsap
Annie McMorris	Dwight Parsons	Trinity Powers	Richard Durham
Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Lois Woolever	Mary White	Nick Nichols	Leo Smith
Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts
Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Kim Hennes	
Residents of the Greenup Nursing Center		Family of Dean Hawes	Family of Bud Mitchell

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**Our Current Series – Hope is Born**

This series is our Advent series of how Christ coming into the world fills us with hope.

November 29th – *Waiting* – Our first advent lesson is about learning to wait.

December 6th – *Preparing* – We are a people who prepare for the coming of the Lord.

December 13th – *Rejoicing* – God gives us reason to rejoice in all things.

December 20th – *Expecting* – We await what we know has come and is coming.

December 24th – *Becoming* – We not only celebrate hope, but we become it.

## **12/6/2020 Update from Pastor Cameron**

Greetings! I'm returning with a weekly update this week because of a change in our situation here in Illinois.

We are suspending in person worship through December 13<sup>th</sup>. That may end up being extended, and I will have that information as soon as it is available.

I am expecting an update next week from the Bishop and the cabinet. I will announce that as soon as we have it but be prepared for things to remain as they are. Though it isn't what I want, looking at the numbers right now, it is a complete toss-up. As such, I will be preparing for no in person worship for the rest of the year. This could change, but I am wanting to prepare people for that possibility now.

As we enter the season of Advent, I am looking for anyone who would like to add anything to worship. Music, readings, prayers, or anything else that you'd like to add, please contact me. I would love to add whatever we can to the services. I also want to apologize, as I am trying to get things printed and emailed earlier in the week, but sometimes life happens.

If you know someone who would like to receive printed information every week, please let me know. If you come to this online, feel free to share it.

The church is still active and working, and as such, still needs your financial support. Please contact me or the church treasurer for options. Thank you for your continued support.

Please see the CDC website for information on the Coronavirus or the IDHP website for information about the current Illinois situation and restrictions.

Please stay safe. You are all in my prayers. I will keep you updated as best I can. If you have any questions, feel free to contact your Church Council Chair or myself.

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael

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