

## “Prepare The Way! – Repent!”

*(Isaiah 40:1 – 5, Mark 1:1 – 8)*

**Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.**

In Marks’ Gospel the good news of Jesus Christ begins with **John the Baptist**.

Most ancient paintings depict him as a **WILD; LONG-HAIRED; CAMEL’S-HAIR-CLOTHES-WEARING**; man going around yelling out, the one word he is best known for: [Matt 3:2]:

### **“REPENT!”**

That’s how the good news of Jesus Christ begins:

**“Repent! The Kingdom of heaven is near!”**

We have the image of him as a ‘**fire and brimstone**’ kind of preacher. He does not seem to be like someone proclaiming the good news!

Especially when he thunders on about repentance in Matt 3:7,8

***“you brood of vipers! . . Produce fruit in keeping with repentance”***

And join this with the message that he and the prophet ISAIAH proclaimed about preparing a way for the Lord in the wilderness,

***“In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”*** Isaiah 40:3

you tend to hear a message that is anything but loving, and comforting, and welcoming! All you hear is a list of impossible demands! And the word **“REPENT!”** becomes a dirty word!

**WE must level every mountain and hill!**

**WE must raise up every valley!**

**WE must smooth every rough place!**

All of this certainly doesn’t sound like the “comfort, comfort my people” Isaiah spoke of! And it doesn’t sound anything like a good news message!

***BUT THAT IS NOT THE “REPENT!” MESSAGE THAT JOHN PROCLAIMS!***

John’s talk of lifting up every valley, and making every mountain and hill level and all the crooked places straight does sound like an impossible task being asked of us. And the message is a very depressing one, when misunderstood!

John's message, “**REPENT!**” is a **WORD OF GRACE!**

John is **NOT** talking about what **WE must do** as part of our repentance!

**BUT what GOD DOES** in us as a result of our repentance; as a result of our turning toward him and acknowledging our need for him, and determining to walk in his way.

John's message is the Good News of God’s Grace coming to us, and we need to turn back to him!

The good news of our faith – the good news that is the Gospel is that:

***GOD has reached out, and continues to reach out to us!***

The essence of the good news, the Gospel, is that:

***GOD has overcome all barriers in his Son!***

The Christian faith proclaims the good news that **GOD** calls out to us - and **COMES** to us - and **INVITES** us to be re-united with him - and to live with him in joy and peace.

The amazing, hard to comprehend, good news is that:

***It is God himself who prepares, the way!***

Let’s have a close look at the prophecy of **Isaiah** especially v.4

***<sup>4</sup>Every valley SHALL be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads SHALL become straight, the rough ways smooth.***

and the proclamation of **John the Baptist** – “**REPENT!**”

and in the ministry of the **Christ** whose first sermon began with these words:

**“Jesus began to preach,  
‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’”**

We learn that:

**GOD HIMSELF PREPARES THE ROAD FOR US AND LEADS US TO HIMSELF!**

As a matter of fact, God comes down the road towards us!

- as he did in **EDEN**, and
- as the father of the **PRODIGAL SON** ran down the road to meet him

God comes down the road towards us and invites us:

***“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. <sup>2</sup> Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare.”***

[Isaiah 55:1-2]

God always did, and still does that sort of thing! He chases after us with his love and grace and mercy and forgiveness!

***“Surely goodness and love will follow [PURSUE] me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”*** [Psalm 23:6]

**“REPENT!” is NOT A DEMAND!**

Repentance is **MORE** like an urgent call to turn back from disaster! Like an anxious parent our loving God chases after us, anxiously calling out

**“REPENT!” - “Turn back”**

**“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”**

In other words, **“REPENT!”- “TURN BACK!”** and ***“Don’t miss out God’s comforting love and peace and life by continuing in the wrong direction!”***

The call to **“REPENT!”** is an **URGENT** and **GRACIOUS INVITATION** to come and immerse ourselves in the vastness of God’s grace and mercy and fellowship which he has prepared in his Son Jesus Christ!

It’s a continuing call, a call we first received at our **Baptism**, a call to **ENTER** into a loving, healing relationship with him so that we might experience the peace and the joy, the strength and the hope and the love we need for grace-filled living in this world.

**In fact God wants that for us so much, that he gave himself to us without qualification or reserve, to make it all possible!**

**In the child born in Bethlehem, in Jesus, God came to live with us and to establish peace with us, through his sacrificial death on the cross for us!**

**And he continues to come to us with the comfort of his loving grace in Word and Sacrament.**

**“Taste and see that the LORD is good.” [Psalm 34:8]. Amen.**

**The peace and love of God which passes all human understanding,  
keep our heart and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

Sermon by Pastor John Simboras, 6 December 2020