

# SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

## Second Sunday of Advent

December 6, 2020

### Psalm 85:1–13 (ESV):

1 LORD, you were favorable to your land;

you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

2 You forgave the iniquity of your people;

you covered all their sin. Selah

3 You withdrew all your wrath;

you turned from your hot anger.

4 Restore us again, O God of our salvation,  
and put away your indignation toward us!

5 Will you be angry with us forever?

Will you prolong your anger to all generations?

6 Will you not revive us again,

that your people may rejoice in you?

7 Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,

and grant us your salvation.

8 Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,

for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints;

but let them not turn back to folly.

9 Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,

that glory may dwell in our land.

10 Steadfast love and faithfulness meet;

righteousness and peace kiss each other.

11 Faithfulness springs up from the ground,

and righteousness looks down from the sky.

12 Yes, the LORD will give what is good,  
and our land will yield its increase.

13 Righteousness will go before him  
and make his footsteps a way.

**First Reading: Isaiah 40:1–11 (ESV):**

**Comfort for God's People**

40 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that her warfare is ended,  
that her iniquity is pardoned,  
that she has received from the LORD's hand  
double for all her sins.

3 A voice cries:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 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.

5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
and all flesh shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

**The Word of God Stands Forever**

6 A voice says, "Cry!"  
And I said, "What shall I cry?"  
All flesh is grass,  
and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

7 The grass withers, the flower fades  
when the breath of the LORD blows on it;

surely the people are grass.

8 The grass withers, the flower fades,  
but the word of our God will stand forever.

### **The Greatness of God**

9 Go on up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good news;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good news;  
lift it up, fear not;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
“Behold your God!”

10 Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
behold, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.

11 He will tend his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms;  
he will carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead those that are with young.

### **EPISTLE: 2 Peter 3:8–14 (ESV):**

8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

11 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! 13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

## **Final Words**

14 Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

## **THE GOSPEL - Mark 1:1–8 (ESV):**

### **John the Baptist Prepares the Way**

**1** The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

**2** As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,  
who will prepare your way,

**3** the voice of one crying in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight,’ ”

**4** John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **5** And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

**6** Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. **7** And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. **8** I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

## **Sermon 47 – Second Sunday of Advent**

“Paradigm Shift”

Mark 1:1-8

Dear friends,

Mark is our Gospel writer today. Mark is Mr. “I Don't Have Time For This”. He often reads like a guy who is either really short of paper or is in a big hurry to take down the relevant details before he moves onto something else. You can see

an excellent glimpse into this very minimalist, to-the-point style in the Gospel lesson. Not details, no story setting, no window dressing. Just get 'er done. Just the facts, ma'am. As much as I look forward to teasing Mark about this when I see him in heaven, this simple way of doing things shows its weight here. Mark is introducing something dramatically new and very old here, and sometimes the best way to introduce something is just to show them the darn thing. Don't talk about it for hours, just show them. Mark understands this. This is Jesus, but first it is John the Baptizer. These two are linked, God makes this very clear. John and Jesus are two parts of God's unfolding plan, and these taking these two together shows us God's overarching plan for humanity as a whole. I want you to see your relationship with God, you lot, as starting here. This is where it's being outlined, this is where the substance of it is being introduced.

**“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, 3 the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’” 4 John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”**

Mark cites Isaiah, a popular thing to do, and the right thing to do, because He does this to show precisely what a great deal of the New Testament spends its time establishing. This is all according to plan. God was aiming for this from the very beginning. The prophets are talking about what's about to happen. Moses talked about this. God Himself promised this from the very beginning. The Old Testament isn't just set up, that's not all it is, but it does set the stage for what Mark is about to write about. It begins with a messenger, John the Baptizer, and this messenger has a mission: To prepare the way of the Lord. How? By crying out in the wilderness.

What does that mean? John comes to preach and to baptize, very simply. He is there to tell prepare by telling people that Jesus is coming, God is coming, His long silence is being broken and He is sending the main act, the center-stage show is about to arrive and you need to be ready.

John's message is one of repentance, specifically, John is telling people why they need to repent. Other Gospels get into much more detail about this – because those other Gospel writers are not Mark – and they tell us that John gets into people's faces and tells them exactly what God thinks of them, their philosophy, their way of living, and just about everything else. John is exceedingly blunt and confrontational, showing that God understands what immorality is, God knows what right and wrong is, God is watching right and wrong happen, and He isn't happy with the wrong part. This is not friendly, it is not agreeable, John has not read “making friends and influencing people” and he seems determined to demonstrate that. As you've heard before, this is all of a purpose. God must confront sin and expose it for what it is. God must confront sinners and expose them for who they are, that is part of who He is. God is just, He is fair, He is right and wrong, and He will show that to His people whether they like it or not. He chooses John as his voice to do so. So John isn't being mean, He isn't being bad with people, He was just doing His job. He was challenging people on their bad behavior and demanding that they get it into their heads that this was bad behavior, it was sin, and God does not like sin. At all.

I remind you that this is key to our understanding of the Scriptures as Lutherans. We see the whole Bible as a repeating pattern of God's condemnation and blessing, Law and Gospel is how we put it. All the Scripture is consistently

demonstrating how much sinners we are, either by telling us exactly what our problem is, or by showing it to us unflinchingly in war, murder, and other kinds of obvious evil. They do this so that we do not rest easy, so that we do not grow content in ourselves, but seek our fulfillment, our meaning, and ultimately our good outside ourselves. There's a lot of good in this world, and this is a blessing, thanks be to God, but there's too much bad in the human nature to ignore. We shouldn't. We shouldn't ignore it in our world, and as John reminds us, we should absolutely never ignore it in ourselves. It is so very easy to do so when you look at the grossest of the crimes committed throughout human history, many of them you can page through the Old Testament and find. It's easy to go easy on ourselves because our sins are so much more socially acceptable. John tells us not to. God does not accept our sins. He condemns them. He hates them.

But, in the eternal mystery of God our Father, He does not hate us, even though we are absolutely the ones doing all this wrong. He loves us, instead. He doesn't dismiss our wrong, pooh pooh it away, or adjust the rules to make us comfortable. He sends Jesus instead, which is the reason John is doing any of what he is doing. **“5 And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”** John says he isn't the big show, and condemnation is not what makes the Christian church, God, or the Bible. We condemn for repentance, we condemn for change and turning and transformation, and that's what John says.

He will baptize with the Holy Spirit, with God Himself. He will take God's holiness, give it to you, and make it your holiness. John demonstrates God's unyielding righteousness, His commitment to fixing the problems, righting the wrongs. Jesus demonstrates God's mercy, His commitment to fixing the problem of you and me by righting our wrongs.

Again, this is the whole Bible. Law and Gospel. You find it in Genesis 3. You find it in Revelation. You find it everywhere in between. God wrote this book to make all this happen with words in you and in me. Baptizing with the Holy Spirit has been turned into kind of a wacky concept over the centuries, but the simplest explanation of that phrase is what happens to us. We're made part of God's family. We're welcomed into His church and we're kept in His church. The bad news makes way for the good, it makes a straight path right into a good relationship with God. John emblemized both, and Jesus did too. As much as John condemns and tells the truth, Jesus did as well, calling people liars and snakes when the situation called for it. But that was never where it stopped, and that is never where God stops with you either.

Christians are often thought to be harsh, holier-than-thou types. We Lutherans know the danger of that too well, we tend to stay in the background because we don't want to be seen to be too in love with ourselves, too presumptuous. John shows us that this attitude isn't just an attitude, and reassures us that we don't place our faith in God in vain. We must say what is right and what is wrong, just like he did, but we must say it for the right reasons, just like He did. John prepared the way of the Lord by talking about sin openly and honestly. We do the same, on the basis of this understanding of the Scriptures that John shows us,



but we do it for the same goal, and that is preparing the way of the Lord. Preparing hearts to hear His Gospel. Jesus did not come for the healthy, but the sick. Jesus did not come for people who are self-satisfied, He came for people who know they need forgiveness. That is why we speak what we do, and that is why we hold fast not just to those Scriptures but to the model they represent in how we present our faith. Sin is in all of us, and the Bible will not let us forget it. It will not let us get too haughty or comfortable with ourselves, it will not let us get too self-righteous, we just have to listen to it. Heed things like John, who calls on us to baptize, to teach, to approach God with a heart that just wants to be better, to do better, and expects to receive better.

Speaking the truth isn't mindless judgment. It isn't an exercise in putting ourselves above our neighbor. Speaking the truth means speaking the truth to ourselves first, and we do that every Sunday. I, God, am a poor miserable sinner, and the only thing I deserve is death and hell. But you gave me more, you gave me better.

You gave me Your Son Jesus, crucified for my sins.

Amen.