Advent 2B 2020 God’s preparation and promise

How are your Christmas preparations going? Are you stressed out over falling behind? Are the years catching up to you slowing you down or is this covid pandemic forcing you to rethink and redo how you celebrate?

The theme for this Second Sunday in Advent is all about Preparing too. Well you might think that’s just great, more preparations piled on me now at church when I cannot handle the ones at home. You may be tempted to tune out to escape any more responsibilities or to avoid the guilt of being unable to add even the smallest task but the Lord has a different message for us today that leads to our joy. Stay tuned!

When we think of preparing for Christmas, it leads us to remember and hold fast to the traditions of past celebrations and even open to adding new ones. The more of these we have, the more work it takes. It means more decorating. As our families and circle of friends grow, it requires more Christmas shopping. However, this year of the mask and social distancing may lead to more visits on line over the computer or by telephone.

But young children do not have such thoughts. When it comes to Christmas preparations, infants are care free. They have no such memories but only the excitement of what is to come. Do they worry over guest lists and keeping up traditions? Their joy is in the receiving. They are captivated by expectation as they meet Christmas for the first time.

In the same way, faith receives the Christ-child. It is the greatest joy of all!

Now listen to St. Mark describe the beginning of the good news of Jesus. He gives us a new and joyous look at preparing for Christmas. The Gospel according to Mark begins not with the birth of Jesus as does Luke’s, or his ancestral lineage as does Matthew’s, nor with Christ at the beginning of the cosmos as does John’s, but with God’s messenger John the Baptist preparing for the coming of Jesus.

Mark quotes Malachi and Isaiah: *Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way.* Who is the messenger and who is doing the sending? God is the one sending John the Baptist. John prepares the way for Jesus by preaching and proclaiming Christ’s coming.

This is truly a different way of preparing! God is the one preparing. See how God gets ready for His Son. He sends the last prophet John to prepare the Lord’s way.

Now we are always to let go of everything that is not godly or not right. Evil is never to get the upper hand. Faith cannot live where sin is the Master. Where Christ is found as a New Master, there is no love of sinning. His Lordship leads to sorrow of falling into sin, never giving oneself over to it.

God’s Law applied us leads to confessing our sins to God instead of our natural way of covering them up or ignoring them, or by being so busy we try to bury them. As Adam and Eve ran as fast as they could away from God, so do all their children. Lord be merciful to me a sinner.

But that is not where God’s message ends. The Gospel gives us Christ. As God gave Adam and Eve a better covering of sin, leather clothes, so God has given us Jesus, whose death covers all your sin. In Jesus, God has forgiven you.

Your baptism into Christ in the same way is a covering over sin. Through baptism, God has washed away sin’s burden and guilt. Christ has claimed you as His own when He baptized you. You are under new management now. Your life is not your own. It never was. It was once enslaved by the devil as you came into this world but now is freed by Christ as your new and merciful Master.

The joy of the Christian faith is that God is preparing us to receive His Son. God prepares us for His Kingdom by showing us that our sin enslaved us to a foreign dictator, the devil, but now in sending us His Son, God is reconciled to us, not the other way around.

God is reconciled to Us, not the other way around

As long as we try to get ready to meet God, we will be frustrated and burdened. For as hard as we try, we cannot avoid death. Death is owed us for sinning. From that we are never free.

Whenever it is taught or held that somehow we have to get ourselves ready to meet God, the devil has gained a foothold and won’t let go. This lie leaves us restless and nervous. It encourages doubt about our salvation and erodes the certainty of salvation.

But God wants you to be sure about where you stand with Him. He is no longer your enemy because of His Son, our Saviour. God has made us his children through Jesus death and then applying that great gift in holy baptism. Baptism now saves you as Peter has written. Baptism gives us forgiveness and puts us into God’s Kingdom of mercy.

John’s baptism in the wilderness had a shelf life. It only lasted for a while until John’s voice was silenced and his prophetic ministry came to an end. But the baptism which Christ gave us is eternal. His baptism gives us eternal life. John’s pointed to and was all about Jesus.

Jesus is the Joy of all the world now. He is the Reason why you gladly lay aside the old way of sin and rejoice in the new freedom from death and sin in Christ. This is God’s promise to you. Everyone who believes and is baptised, will receive salvation.

The Good News of Jesus coming to us through preaching and baptism is a game changer. Sure, we can keep our Christian traditions but now in Christ, there is a different reason to do them. All things point to Christ. His love for you is your joy and the certainty of God’s promise of salvation!