

Make Straight the Way of the Lord

Bible Verses Referenced: Mark 1:18, Isaiah 40 2 Peter 3, Genesis 1:1, John 1:1

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we bless you, we thank you for the challenge to make our lives straight for you, to come straight in and fill us with the gift of your presence and your Holy Spirit. We ask that the ministry and preaching of Your Word might be Your Word for the sake and glory of Your Son, Jesus. In His name we pray. Amen. Please be seated. When I was a teenager and even younger, I used to love a game called Hide and Go Seek.

I don't know if y'all are familiar with that one, but you have a big group of kids and everybody goes and runs and hides. And then you have this one person who is affectionately called it. You are it. And so it is supposed to count down and you can make a really long count. You have to count to 100 it. Or you count short counts.

They're going to give people not much chance to hide. But after they count down, they say this, ready or not, here I come. You know that one? You guys have played that before? Ready or not, here I come. Well, that is what today is all about. Ready or not, here I come, only the it is the Lord. Ready or not, here comes the Lord.

And instead of the one crying out for the Lord, we have a prophet who is speaking on the Lord's behalf, John the Baptist, who is saying, get ready. He's coming. It's time. You're either ready or you're not. Make straight the way of the Lord. You know, one of the things that's still working, this metaphor of hide-and-go-seek, we tend to hide when it comes to the coming of the Lord.

And there is something that is deep within us, that is part of us being human beings, that makes us hide from God when He comes. And what it is, is guilt and shame. We have sinned, and when we sin, we become guilty. Guilt is always connected with some specific actions. You know, I stole something, so I'm guilty of stealing.

But one of the things that comes right alongside of guilt is shame. Shame is more nebulous, but it becomes something of our identity. It's a mantle that we wear like clothing. Shame says that I am a bad person. So it takes our guilt, which is associated with an action and says, I am a thief. You know, I stole something, I'm a thief.

And it's that shame that causes human beings to self-hide. You remember Adam and Eve in the garden of Garden of Eden, when they had eaten from the apple and the Lord comes to find them, what are they doing? Hiding. They're hiding because they are ashamed. Now that is what John the Baptist is waking us up to.

Last Sunday, Father William very powerfully challenged us to keep awake, to be alert to the fact that the Lord is on His way. And the advent reminds us of both the first coming of the Lord with the advent of Jesus as God in the flesh, but then the second coming of our Lord. So we often read about passages like 2 Peter, where we're hastening this coming day of the Lord, where the Lord will return in power and great might.

And so, once we become aware and awake to this grand story of God, now we have to know, well, what are we going to do about that? And so if last week was keep awake, today is make straight. John the Baptist challenges us to make straight the way of the Lord. I want to read just a little bit of our Gospel passage for us today. This is the very beginning of the Gospel of Mark.

Just as a little aside, we are following a lectionary, which is appointed readings in the church. And so you have your A, your B, and your C. And so, Advent is the beginning of the church year, and one of the ways that you can tell whether you're in your A, B, or C is because of which gospel that you're reading. So you have gospel of Matthew and your A, gospel of Mark in your B, and Luke in your C. Does that make sense?

You go, well, where's D and John? Well, we just kind of first John all through it. So we only have three years, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke. So we're in year B, and we're starting to read passages from the

Gospel of Mark. Mark was the shortest of the gospels, and in some ways, the most hard-hitting and the most powerful. Right out of the gate, Mark gives the thesis statement for the gospel. He tells us exactly what he's going to tell us about in the gospel.

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. That says it all. That word "beginning" is the Greek word "Genesis." Mark is doing something very similar to some of the other New Testament writers. John began his gospel with "In the Beginning" was the word. The writer of the book of Hebrews does something very similar. In the beginning, God spoke through various means.

Mark is saying exactly the same thing. What is taking place, be aware, be awake, is a new creation breaking forth with the coming of God in the flesh. It's good news. Something that humanity has been waiting for, longing for the coming of the Messiah. It represents new creation, a new Genesis, the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

So, 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 straight his paths." John the Baptist is the one who says, "Ready or not, the Lord is coming. It's time for the new creation to break forth into this world." The Messiah is arriving.

And one of the job description that you find for John the Baptist in his role is to prepare the way to make sure that we are ready for His coming, for His advent. And so you read the job description of John the Baptist, and we just quoted a little bit in the Gospel of Mark, but you have a fuller description in our Isaiah reading, where he says, "You are to prepare the way of the Lord to make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up, every mountain and hill made low. The uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places made a plain, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all the flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. John the Baptist's job is to say, "The Lord is coming, and we need to make His way a straight shot." He's describing a spiritual highway.

I used to live in Houston, Texas. Do you remember that place? And one of the things that would happen about this time of year is we would make a trip from Houston to Jacksonville to come and see our family. And one of the problems of Houston is it's a long way off, but one of the nice things about that is I could literally come out of my neighborhood and get on Interstate 10 and drive on I-10 all the way to Jacksonville and get off and be right at my dad's house.

Isn't that cool? That's a highway. Now it took a long time and one of the frustrations and it's a little difference between my wife and me is that I like to stop a lot. Like, oh, there's a Bucky's. Oh, there's, let's stop there. Let's stop there. She's like, I just want to get there. So you know if you're riding with Brooke, you need to know you're going to be driving long and fast.

But that's the gift of a highway. But we often take these highways for granted. The country didn't always have I-10s. I went back and I looked up the first transcontinental motor convoy crossing that was led by Eisenhower. Do you remember Dwight Eisenhower? Dwight, one of the great presidents, but before he was a president, he was just in the army.

Before he was a general, he was Lieutenant Eisenhower. And in 1919, he was tasked with seeing whether the U.S. Army had readiness. And so the job was to take this military convoy of various vehicles and so on and go from Washington, D. C. all the way to California. And he was to document the journey. So I have here the travel logs of Eisenhower from 1919.

It starts on July 7th. There's an entry for every single day all the way to September 6th. I'm just going to read the whole thing to you if that's okay. No, I won't do that. I won't torture you. But I love the entries. You know July 7th departed from Camp MiG's dedicated zero milestone at the ellipse Potamic Park, 10:00 a.m., departed Washington, 11:15, stopped for lunch in Rockville, Maryland, 12:30.

At that moment, the trail mobile kitchen broke the coupling. 250, the fan belt broke on the white observation car, and things just don't go so well from there. But it was fair and warm, and the roads were

excellent. They made 46 miles and seven and a half hours. Arrived in Frederick, Maryland at 6:30 p.m.. That was day one. Day two departed Frederick, 7:00 a.m., fan adjustment let go on the Class B.

Hmm. 8:30 a.m., unsafe covered wooden bridge, one mile south of Emmitsburg, reached at 9:00 a.m., two hours delay due to unsafe and covered bridges too low for shop trucks necessitating detours and fording. Made 62 miles in ten and a half hours that day. It just keeps going on from there. This is gripping stuff. But I was reading through this, just highlighting some of the things.

You know, everything from elevations and countering heavy grades and altitudes exceeding 2,200, running into soft sand and ruts, and so on. And boy, it gets really bad when you get to Utah. Things do not go so well. One of the things it's a great comment, this happened early on, this was July 2012.

All tools furnished with the trucks are of inferior quality and construction. What a thing to realize in. I mean, every single day, something breaks, something breaks down. They encounter some obstacle, some difficulty, some challenge. This is by the time they get to Utah. Personnel utterly exhausted by tremendous efforts will rest at Black Point. Trail mobile kitchen again.

Boy, that thing was a lot of problems. Broke wheel wheel bearing, spring hanger, and draw bar all in one day. Two Indian sidecar motorcycles unable to negotiate deep dust and were loaded on trucks. Two Garfoils broke connection rods, cracked crank case, reduced morale, fair and very hot, hard desert trail made 36 miles in seven and a half hours. It took till September to get there. We could keep going.

But the point is, is that Eisenhower realized that the United States of America needed an interstate system. And that's one of the great gifts that he gave you. You go I-10, I-20, I-30, I-40, you go all the way up to the top of the country and you get to I-90. This goes across that way, you know, five, fifteen, twenty-five till you get to 95 on this coast. What an amazing vision that he had, but it came from that.

It came from hard work and dealing with the potholes and the ruts and the covered bridges and having to ford and to go over mountains and through valleys and have things breaking down and difficulties and challenges. This is what the prophet is saying that we need to address in our lives.

That we have spiritual potholes, that we have valleys and mountains and places in our lives that are crooked and kinky and need to be straightened out so that the highway of the Lord can come straight in to our lives because, ready or not, He's coming. And the Lord wants to come into your heart and into your life and be present with you.

But there's a prep work that needs to be done to make a way. And so John the Baptist, the prophet Isaiah, are calling us to that during this season of advent to remove the roadblocks and the obstacles and the difficulties to God and what has separated us from our God. Maybe you have a low valley. What sin has taken you into a place where you're hiding in the depths away from the Lord?

Or maybe it's some sin that was done against you, some hurt or brokenness in your life that has you in a dark valley unable to feel the presence of the Lord because of its darkness, some embarrassment, some shame, or the high mountains. These are the high places in our life where we have made an idol on the top of a hill.

And we've said, "Oh, look at how great I am here or how wonderful this work of my hands is." That's what idols are, the work of our hands. Look at this, and that pride is preventing God from coming through that mountain. Or what crooked place in our life?

Maybe it's some financial worry or challenge, some debts from overspending or undergiving, the use of our time, areas of neglect that have been overlooked, or places where we have rough places, unforgiveness, or places where we need to repent and turn towards another person. We could just keep thinking about all the places where our axles have broken down over these things in our life, right?

Where we've blown a fan motor or ripped a belt out through a rod. We've got a whole roadway of wreckage. But see, what the Lord has done is not just called us to address these places in our lives, but the gift, and I'm going to end with this, is the gift of what John the Baptist is announcing, is that not only is

the Lord calling us to make His way straight, but He is providing all the things necessary for that to take place in our life.

Through the grace of what Jesus has done on the cross and the baptism that He underwent in dying on the cross for our sins, He has made it possible for these rough places, these guilts, these shames, these hurts, these brokenness, these places that are in disrepair to be fixed. By grace we have been saved, and through His grace, we are given all the tools necessary for us to be honest about these places in our life and to see them and to offer them to the Lord.

But it's even greater than that. John the Baptist, he says, "I am not worthy to bend down and to even tie the thong of his sandal." That's that shame talking. But he says, "I'm just baptizing with water for repentance, but after me comes one more powerful than I who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit of the living God." And this is the real power to break down the mountains.

See, when you're making a highway and you get to certain places, you need dynamite. Trust me, you go through the mountains, you see the places where they drilled and put the dynamite in. The dynamite that makes a highway for the Lord in our lives is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, where we are filled with the fullness of God and He blows away all the places that are inappropriate and wrong in our life and convicts us deeply and repairs the breaches and levels the playing field and gives God a path straight in.

So here's our challenge this advent season for the second week. One, keep awake. That was last week. Now make straight. Call upon the one who is coming, the Lord Jesus Christ, and ask Him to fill you with the Holy Spirit, that spiritual dynamite, to make straight the path for the Lord. Very simple prayer.

You know, Lord, thank you for your passion and your desire to come into my life. In a very simple prayer, you could just pray it right now, Lord, fill me with Your Holy Spirit and make straight Your way in my heart.