**“Straight to the Barn”**

Malachi 3:1-7b

Philippians 1:2-11

Luke 3:1-14 (15-18)

 Advent 2, Dec. 4/5, 2021

The continuation of the Gospel from Luke 3: “As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, ‘I baptize you with water, but **He who is mightier than I IS COMING, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.** **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire**. His winnowing fork is in His hand, to **clear His threshing floor** and to **GATHER THE WHEAT INTO HIS BARN**, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.’ So with many other exhortations he preached Good News to the people.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Bridge**

The **2nd** Advent candle that we’ve now have lit (along with 1) is the candle of “**preparation**” and “**faith**”. Where, last week, “**hope**” was provided us made “**certainty**” by the promises of God fulfilled in Jesus, today we’re to **prepare by humble repentance for the forgiveness of sins**.

“Preparation”, apparently, isn’t **my best suit**. We all have one particular nightmare that re-occurs itself in various ways from time to time. Mine use to be **being unprepared for a final in college**. I’d come into class oblivious to the final test that’s being passed out, without a clue of the answers to questions on it having apparently skipped all the classes and learned nothing that could prepare me. I’d done no assignments apparently, never showed up to a class before, and didn’t even know that the final was that day since I’d not been to previous classes and thought I’d finally try one out. What a **nightmare** … and that one **lasted most of my adult life**.

My **newer one** is related to my being a pastor because **in this one** I’ve shown up for an ordination service or installation where all the pastors show up early to it with their red stoles ready and we all relax and talk after getting dressed into our robes. Well I barely get there on time and can’t find my robe and run through the parking lot to check various offices (it’s all at my church) then discover that I’m the preacher for the service and can’t find a sermon manuscript anywhere. So I’m sitting in the front of the church finally (and get woken up about this time) panicked / making something up while I’m sitting in front.

John (the pre-curser of Jesus’ arrival) tells us we’re in the **season of** “**preparation**”. And the Lord comes **in spite of our “preparation-level, or lack thereof**. **He comes / is coming / comes still (weekly at least in Word and Sacrament)**, and the “way” or “path” that we’re on must be “straightened” with His arrival. We’d better have our “ducks in a row” / “house in order” / “have our peace made with God” because He **is and does and will (not too far down the road) finally come**. And our **readiness** (or “straight **way**”) depends on our “**preparedness**”.

**Text**

That **whole point** was made in **700** **B.C.**, in **400 B.C.**, and in **30 A.D.**. Isaiah, and then Malachi, then John (**through whom the** **final “official” message** would be delivered) were “**voices**” **/** “**messengers**” **of God announcing this**, with John being the **immediate pre-curser** who was **foretold by God through those other two**. So important was this message and “voice” that John has been the **only** **human foretold** hundreds of years before he ever **physically** existed. If you want to enhance the **picture** of the **mind of God**, **here’s** a **wonderful visual**. He ordained the person and work of a man spoken-of that much before he was created and born. You and I (like John Scripture tells us) are **known and pre-ordained by God (in His mind) before time began**. And that’s just one more piece of wonder in God that we can have of **His plan for us**. You and I are not **incidental**. John wasn’t incidental. And God in Christ Jesus came to be human Himself to redeem non-incidental **(repentant) human beings (“wheat” baptized believers are called saved from having fallen from the gracious plan)**. By Adam and Eve’s sin and ours, **we’d** **left** the “straight path”, so **God’s Son CAME** to make the “path **straight**” **and accessible**. He’d **COME** to **redeem a roadway** and then encourage “**our following of Him on it**”. He’d **COME** to (and this is **why** I added what was recorded after our published Gospel reading) “**gather wheat Straight to the Barn**” that is **His Kingdom**.

Had I left that part off the reading, it’d sound like “**preparation**” was **all an impossible amount of Law that we can’t do perfectly in order to warrant readiness**. “What then shall we **DO**” John got asked. “**whoever has** two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise” perfectly. **Tax collectors**, “collect no more than you are authorized to do” with perfection. **Soldiers**, “do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation and be perfectly content with your wages.” **Parents**, “raise your children to fear the Lord **always**, preparing them for Him”, **children**, “fear the Lord **always**, being prepared”. **Leaders of this country (the United States)**, “lead by legislating for the sanctity of life and the sanctity of marriage in all things, protect families and innocent pre-born children, run for office as people not just nice or friendly, but faithful to God always, straight on the Lord’s way, **Godly** (and not just using His name and yet producing ungodly results).” **DO** **all those things (and about 5 million things more) perfectly and maybe you might be better “prepared” for the Lord’s COMING** …

… which takes me back to **my nightmare**. I **fear** not even having a proper gift to offer back to someone giving me one on Christmas Eve, and I’m **overwhelmed in a panic way** (sometimes) by what all I’m not ready-for for the next day or the next few weeks. I had to **move beyond our published Gospel reading to** **find Good News that I craved to hear**. I didn’t want to be **left** with John’s accusation of **what I already knew in duty that I’m not living up to or only minimally “prepared for”**. I wanted **Gospel upon my crookedness** … and **it’s provided BEYOND verse 14**. Then **the rest of Luke** **unfolds it in what “preparation” you and I have without our** “**DOING ANYTHING EXCEPT FOR THE GIVING-OVER OF OUR SINS TO THE LORD JESUS’ DOING**.

“**Repentance for the forgiveness of sins**” is **just that:** **letting Jesus save us because we know ourselves as ones needing saved** … which **He did and does**. Immediately after this Gospel text Jesus is recorded **baptized into us so to carry all the sin that we’ve left in baptismal waters and confessed to a cross where He died with them … as payment for all of them**. And God had been preparing for **that gift** of **redemption for sins given-over and confessed** from before time, and then (in time) 4,000 years as our clocks turn.

## Application

That Gospel actually **was proclaimed** in the published portion of Luke 3. Isaiah and Malachi both told-about what John would finally announce. “Every valley **shall be** filled, and every mountain and hill **shall be** made low, and the crooked **shall become** straight, and the rough places **shall become** level ways, and all flesh **shall see** the Salvation of God.” **That’s** **what** **Christmas, etc. reminds us of**.

Much can be noticed as **crooked** (and **we** can **contribute to that**). Much can be noticed rough and un-level (felt that way, and accurately so) … we know the reason. Even **John** wasn’t immune to a **challenging journey** through this life. Beyond our reading we’re told that (**for him**) “Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by John for Herodias, his brother’s wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, added **this to them all**, that he **locked up John in prison**” … and we know the rest of the story (it wasn’t a fun existence).

Some of **you** have been kept from any (much) seasonal joy because of personal **valleys** noticeable … or the public ones that really have **you affected challengingly**. There is much **crookedness** in politics and divisiveness and relationships and COVID and COVID prevention and treatment and cancers and aches and pains. Christ Jesus **CAME** (S**alvation by Him** did) to “straighten out” what, otherwise, could **drive us off track and into permanent hopelessness**.

There is but **one task to DO** in preparation for the Lord’s coming. “**Repent**”, knowing that you **need to**. “The **forgiveness of sins**” is **THE GIFT** freely there to those **simply giving over to Jesus the entirety of their sins**. In +Jesus’ name. Amen.