

## **December 9, 2018**

Bar 5:1-9; Phil 1:4-6, 8-11; Lk 3:1-6

We hear in the Gospel today the voice of John the Baptist: *“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. ... The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth.”* So what does it mean to prepare the way of the Lord? What does it mean to make straight the path for Christ to come to us? Last week Jesus spoke to us about removing the barriers of carousing, drunkenness, and anxiety - today, John speaks of repentance.

Do you have a table in your house, a corner of your room, a desk, a closet that gets filled with junk? You just keep putting things there and say that you’ll get to it another time. You know it needs to be cleaned out, you know that the space is running out if something good comes along that needs to go there. What if you knew that something good was coming, what if you knew that you could have a great thing but you’ll miss it if there is not room for it ... that’s kinda the truth. A life with Jesus at the center brings blessings and peace that are amazing. Yet, just like the inns that turned away Mary and Joseph, we can have too much stuff in our hearts to let Jesus in. We can have so much of ourselves, our plans, our desires - that the door is blocked; we can have made the acceptance of Jesus so complicated by questioning - and not just accepting - the simple truths of faith that the path to the door to our hearts is a long and winding road.

*“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.”* How do we straighten a path to the door that has become twisted through our over-thinking and our needs for some kind of proof to satisfy us before we believe, how do we get the courage to clean up a little, throw a few things out, and straighten the clutter? John today speaks of repentance. Repentance can get a bad rap in our culture of sensitivity, although, it is essential for human and spiritual growth. Repentance is not beating ourselves up and figuring out how bad we are, it is looking at ourselves with the same love God has for us and seeing the truth about where we stand, and then act on it. This acknowledging and regretting our past wrongs shouldn’t make us reduce our love for ourselves, but rather, we should love ourselves so much that we want to improve. John calls out from the wilderness, he calls from the lifeless desert that we may sometimes find ourselves in - he calls for the kind of repentance that helps us increase our self-respect - he brings a message that accepting Jesus is something life-giving.

In the second reading, St. Paul prays that the Philippians' love *may increase ever more and more*, how? - by *discern[ing] what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ*. To work to be pure and blameless discernment should be done with love and self respect. If we love and respect ourselves, and love and respect God, we will feel sorry for where we fall short - but this sorrow shouldn't depress us, but move us to action. If we see that we have not been giving enough time to God, that we have not been being as generous with our time and love to others, then our hearts may be filled with a little junk. The cleaning out of that closet happens when we readjust our time and energy. I've had times where I was tired and would rather not have prayed - but after doing it I realized that the time with the Lord (even a short time) was well worth it. The road may have become twisted by overthinking and demanding God to give proof. I've felt the great relief of simply trusting in God and allowing God to work in the situations of life - the road becomes straighter and Jesus arrives at my door with his peace.

If we see our heart is too cluttered with things that distract us from God then we should do something about it and not just talk about it. If a parent was to ask their child to clean their messy room, and the child admitted it was a mess, and that they were sorry, and that it won't happen again, and then sits down to a plate of nachos and starts watching T.V. - that parent would have a hard time believing that those words of the child were serious - and really ... they might not be as serious as they seemed. Words that are not followed by action - even a little bit - are hollow - they don't really help us to become the person we were created to be. Realizing what we should do and turning it into action that brings something great is echoed in the first reading when we hear: *Take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God forever*. Put aside a barren and self defeating sorrow for your sins, and listen to the call from God for a repentance that is not about beating yourself up, but about transformation. A transformation where we *put on the splendor of glory from God*, a transformation where we straighten that road to our hearts made twisted by our own thoughts, a transformation that allows us to look upon ourselves and God with love and self respect and move towards God.

We have cause for feeling better about ourselves in this Advent season if we can honestly acknowledge past wrongs and make at least a little effort to change. We have cause to love and rejoice if we have made, not a barren repentance, but a repentance that works to straightens the road that will allow Christ into our hearts more deeply this coming Christmas season.