Springfield Presbyterian Church

Second Week of Advent 2020

The 278th Day of March

**Prepare the Way for Peace**

1. The Messenger

I wonder if John the Baptist ever felt like he got second place in the world of holiness. He was the one, but not THE one, but he had to come to prepare everyone for THE one. But would we have been ready for Christ if John wasn’t first on the scene?

John had a vision, he dreamt a dream, one of peace, one of justice, one that points to something more than himself. He had a dream of love that would propel the world forward, but it was not his dream to fulfill. Yet his enthusiasm does not wane – it says, come, come and hear the Good News and I am preparing you for something you never thought you’d get to feel, see, hear. I know what’s coming, it’s the best surprise and the anticipation is high, but you have to get ready, you have to prepare yourself, that’s why I’m here.

And preparing is sometimes fun – sometimes it is being in this water together with John, being baptized of water, and being joined in community. But sometimes preparing is repentance, it’s admitting our faults and failures, not only in our own minds, but spoken aloud as we make amends in the coming days.

II. Are you ready?

Around this time of year, I ask myself if I’m ready. To be honest, it’s usually an answer of, ‘No, not even close’ because I’m more of a sprinter to that Christmas day. If I manage to put a tree up, we’ll be lucky if the lights are strung on high. I have some goals this year, but I can’t remember the last time that I baked a Christmas cookie. I finally got my Santa hat, so I’m taking that as a start. I may be many wonderful things in my personhood, but prepared is not usually one of them.

If I could have a modern-day conversation with John today, I feel like it would look something like this, “Becca, get ready, the day is near, have you confessed your sins?”, “I mean, not yet, but totally planning on it.”, “Becca, have you spent some time in silence to reflect upon the sacred gift of the day that will come?”, “No, but again, totally on my list.”, “Becca, how are you seeking peace, hope, joy, and love in this season?”, “I mean, again, generally doing my best daily, but can’t give a straight up answer.”

And there’s something really beautiful and poignant and human about admitting this to you – admitting to you that your pastor doesn’t have it together and that’s OK. Every year, Jesus is born on December 25th and every year I feel the divine magic of the night and the holy story surround me. Somehow, God takes me, an ill-prepared human, and says – I’ve prepared something greater for you, a gift, the gift of love found in me.

So perhaps each week, when I ask you the tough questions like, “How will you prepare? How will you share peace? How will you find hope in a world lacking in hope?” Maybe, honestly, I’m asking the same questions of myself. I’m journeying with you, not above you, not from a position of some stated holiness, but of a human on the ground trying to make sense of a confusing world.

And the confusing part right now, at least for me, is that preparing the way, that sense of peace, for me to fully bring Christ into my heart this season, is that the world has a bunch of rough edges. I imagine there were other times in history where this was true – like during a World War, or the 1918 pandemic, or the Great Depression. I also imagine there’s times too where our personal lives feel so fractured that it’s hard to get into this spirit of preparation – when a child is lost, when a marriage does not work out, or when the darkness overwhelms the light in any way. How does a preacher give any sense of hope, peace, joy, and love in those times? How does a preacher give the same today?

I can’t promise full preparation, or rainbows, or unicorns, or anything of the kind, but I think we prepare our hearts the best that we can. We take grace for those days when our tree looks more like Charlie Brown’s Christmas tree, and we ask mercy for those times where we just can’t be the people we’ve been called to be. But maybe in the hecticness, or the loneliness, or the trauma – maybe there’s space for a little light to guide the way. You don’t have to be there, you don’t have to be the cookie-cutter Christian, you just have to hold onto peace, undergirded by hope, as a reality in our world.

There are ways this season that I’m seeking to shine a little bit of light. I see hope when I turn off the news and turn to friends and hear both their struggle and their joy. I see peace when the power goes out, BGE won’t be out for a while, and I’m into a beloved forced sabbath time with candles. Just as there’s no such thing as a cookie-cutter Christian, there’s no cookie-cutter way of preparing to come to the nativity scene this year. You and I, we figure it out – on our own, but also, together.

So, I ask you those same questions that I brought up before – the ones that I ask you and that I find difficult: How will we find hope? How will we find peace? How will we prepare our hearts? Again, remember, there’s no right answer here, and every journey is going to look different. But perhaps, perhaps we can prepare ourselves for what we do already know – we know that love will come, that love will come not with a sword but a shepherd’s crook, and that love will surround us, no matter whether we are truly as prepared as we wish to be. So may God’s love surround you, encourage you, and inspire you this second week of Advent, as we in our human ways, seek to prepare our hearts for the Love that is on the way.