

“Make Room”

NT: Luke 3:1-6

Advent confronts us each year, commands our attention, and demands right response in actively waiting for the coming of Christ. John the Baptist declared, “prepare the way of the Lord.” His bold preaching in the wilderness called people to preparation. And the preparation he was referring to included self-examination, along with a “to-do” list, if they were going to be ready to receive the one coming after him. What John the Baptist said was, “Get ready!!! Make room!!!!”

When asked about his approach to advent, an author provided the following response.

“When I was a teenager, I used to tease my mother about some of her most particular preparations for company. She would get down on her hands and knees and comb the fringe of the oriental carpets in our living and dining rooms so that there were no knots and the entire fringe was perfectly lined up. It looked beautiful when she was finished—so neat and orderly. I tried to point out that one kick or shuffle of our guest’s feet and the beautifully arranged fringe would all be in disarray again, but she would hear nothing of my analysis. She wanted everything, down to the fringe on the carpet, to be perfect when we were preparing for guests. She attended to every detail.”

He continued, “The advent (meaning “coming”) of guests prompts the host not only to straighten up, but also to fix things around the house— a broken doorknob, a loose towel rack, the burned-out light bulb, the leaky guest toilet. Preparing for company often causes the hosts to look at their home, to examine their surroundings with a whole new perspective. Suddenly the countertops are too messy, the broken chair inadequate, the silverware too tarnished. Preparing for guests demands self-examination as much as it involved a “to-do” list.”

It is a responsible thing for us on several occasions to examine our lives, values, and priorities. From this self-examination we come to affirm many of the good things we have to be thankful for while at the same time develop a “to-do” list of things we might need to work on and pay closer attention to. If we are to rightly prepare to receive the wonderful counselor and prince of peace at Christmas, we must be willing to go through the detailed preparation process just as we do when we are planning for company at home.

Let’s look at advent with a slightly different vantage point. I have a great respect for the millions of words John Calvin uses to define Christian doctrine. He had an incredible ability to write the longest sentences ever. Occasionally, I encounter something he says and think, “That is good stuff.” One of those things John Calvin said that I think is really good is that we

(meaning you and I and all of our brothers and sisters in Christ) must “refrain from our own works, in order to leave God to work within us!”

The thought of his statement is so true and so pure, yet the reality of it for us is not so much. The lyrics of Jonathan McReynolds in his song “Make Room” help illustrate the struggle.

*I find space for what I treasure, I make time for what I want, I choose my priorities...
My will, My way, My ego, My plans, My schedule, My itinerary, My habits, My attitude...*

Do you hear all that “I” and “My” emphasis? Isn’t this true for us? Don’t we find ourselves focused on me, myself, and I, barely leaving any room for God to work or exist even? And that is just not right. It is backwards even. For the record, I don’t think this automatically makes us bad people. We are just a bit overwhelmed and distracted and turned away. Ok, maybe a lot. I was trying to give us the benefit of the doubt. Now, if we choose not to do anything about it, then we may be ushering ourselves down a dangerous path. Reminds me of that great cartoon comic that says, “If God is your copilot, switch seats.”

The good and inspiring news is that McReynold’s lyrics take a turn... He says, “God...

*Whatever it is That's in your way (You can move that over)
Whatever it is If it takes your space (You can move that over)
My will, My way, My ego, My plans, My schedule, My itinerary, My habits, My attitude...
(You can move it all over) Oh, see I will make room*

*I wanna seek you first Get the odd things out the way
I wanna seek you first Move it all out the way
See whatever it is Lord, I just want you,... so I will make room,...*

*I find space for what I treasure, I make time for what I want, I choose my priorities and
Jesus you're my number one Oh, see I will make room*

This Advent season, as we excitedly and maybe anxiously await the coming of Christ again, we all need to, as John the Baptist declared, “Prepare the way!!! Get ready!!! Make room!!!” I want to encourage us all to an advent season of self-examination in which we really think about what we treasure most and what we want the most and how our priorities are aligned. As we examine our lives, values, and priorities, where is God in those answers for us? Is God number one or is God three or four or eighth on the list? If God isn’t at the top, what needs to move over or step aside?

Perhaps a helpful question we could all be asking ourselves this season is “What am I pursuing?” or “What am I looking for?” And in asking these questions, “Where do we go to fulfill what we are pursuing or looking for? To whom do we turn?”

One way to tell what we are seeking is to see how we're spending our time, including our thought time. On what are we concentrating all our energy? Do we feel tempest-tossed by everything we need to do, not knowing how to get everything done for school, work, and home? Do we feel agitated about a rocky relationship, troubled by lack of money, concerned about arguments in our families, worried about our grades? Sometimes we let ourselves get caught up in these negative feelings. Sometimes we ignore them and rush from one activity to the next hoping they just go away. And if you are at all like me, at Christmas it's especially easy to get overwhelmed by the frantic pace of the holiday season and sometimes lose sight of what the Christmas season is all about: Christ, Emmanuel, God with us!

When we are feeling pulled in so many different directions and stressed upon by so many different demands, we need to stop and make room. How is trying to do everything yourself working for you? Most specifically, we need to stop and make room for Christ in our life. And by this, I mean make room for Christ's way in our life. And by Christ's way I mean make room for hope, peace, joy, and love. With Christ, in Christ, and through Christ our lives can be filled with hope, peace, joy, and love.

This is what John the Baptist was saying when he said, "Prepare the way." He was telling them all that it was time to focus on the most important things. Sure, you have all these leaders in their places and I know you think they are great, but what you really need to be doing is getting ready for this new leader coming to town. If you all thought what I was doing was special, he is going to be able to fill valleys, make crooked paths straight, and mountains made low. His ways are going to rock this world and you are going to want to be ready for him when he comes. Therefore, do whatever you need to do to prepare and make room.

If there is one thing we want to be sure to make room for in life it is Christ. Christ is a gift, and when we make room for Christ, Christ's way will infiltrate all areas of our life with expressions of hope, peace, joy, and love. Thinking back to what we are pursuing or looking for, all of these are things we pursue and desire in life, right?

For just a moment, I would like to focus in on peace, which I believe underlines one of the most, if not the most, pivotal hopes we long for. Wouldn't you treasure more peace in your life? Don't you want peace? How about someone you know; do you think they would like peace? What are we willing to do to experience peace? Will we move anxiety over? Will we move our attitudes over? Will we make room for Christ, who God prophesies in Isaiah, is the "Prince of peace"?

According to the polls, up until this year, the number one thing people wished for at Christmas has been "peace on earth". This year, people's number one Christmas wish is a computer, and "peace on earth" has moved to second place. Rather shocking, isn't it?

Rather sad, too. And slightly ironic since computers, when they stall, fail, or crash, tend to ruin our peace of mind. But many of us still wish for peace and sing about it in our Christmas carols, echoing what the angels sang over 2000 years ago.

Are we eager to stop what we're doing to let peace into our lives? Do we hear the "heavenly host praising God" in our families, homes, relationships, classes, and careers? Or do we find excuses for not being able to be at peace or complain that we can't find it? Do we listen to the whispers of self-doubt, screams of fear, or grumbles of frustrations?

Looking for a little peace in my work week this week, I took a few moments during lunch to listen to some uplifting songs. As I was listening, I heard the song of a 5-year-old angel sing these words:

*There is peace in Christ when we learn of Him
Feel the love He felt for us when He bore our sins
Listen to His words, let them come alive
If we know Him as He is, there is peace in Christ*

*He gives us hope when hope is gone
He gives us strength when we can't go on
He gives us shelter in the storms of life
When there's no peace on earth, there is peace in Christ*

*There is peace in Christ when we walk with Him
Through the streets of Galilee to Jerusalem
Mend the broken hearts, dry the tear-filled eyes
When we live the way He lived, there is peace in Christ*

When there's no peace on earth, there is peace in Christ
- "Peace in Christ" by McKenna Hixson

Jesus not only exemplified what it means to have a sense of peace by being still, quiet, and prayerful, Jesus is peace. In Isaiah 11:6, the prophet declares, "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them." Unimaginable peace becomes not only imaginable but real in Christ.

As Christ is with us, we must recognize that **peace is already here**. As Christ, through the Holy Spirit, dwells within us, we must recognize that **peace is present within us**. We just have to make room for it living out in our lives.

Maybe we need to wake up earlier in the morning to have quiet time with God. Maybe we need to open the Bible and be inspired. Maybe we need to sit quietly and listen to what God is telling us. Maybe we need to make room in our schedule to give quality time to God and return to God's house to worship more often. Maybe we need to choose to speak to each other peaceably and refuse to speak any other way. Maybe we just need to spend more time together as a family. Maybe we need to turn off the TV, the computer, and the video games and instead talk, play group games, laugh, and pray together. Maybe we need to take five minutes to calm ourselves and let God tell us what to do next. Maybe we can let a favorite hymn (or concert filled with good cheer) fill us with peace before we go on to the next task.

When we make room for Christ and Christ's ways in our life, we will naturally feel a greater sense of peace within ourselves. When we make room in our life, in our hearts and homes, for Christ, God's prophesy is fulfilled, "every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God..."

Prepare!!! Get ready!!! Make room!!! For with Christ, in Christ, and through Christ, peace on earth is unimaginably possible and present.

God sent Christ so that we, God's children, would know of God's hope, peace, joy, and love. God sent Christ so that we would experience a love so wide and so boundless that there was a seat at the table for all. With Christ, in Christ, and through Christ, God made room and continues to make room, at the ultimate banquet table for all. This table is the Lord's table and there is a seat for all those who trust and believe in God's love poured out through Jesus. This table is not just enough for us who are here in this space, but also those of you on the radio and video wherever you are, and those who are gathered in other sanctuaries down the street, and those who are gathered in tents or schools or under trees or in fields or homes or on the road traveling. At the Lord's table, there is room for all to come and be nourished and strengthened in the blessings of Emmanuel, God with us.