



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for the Second Sunday of Advent
December 6, 2020

Prepare the Way of the Lord

Isaiah 40:1–11

¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

⁶ A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

⁹ Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" ¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

In Isaiah 40 we find the comforting message that the forerunner of Christ was to preach: The glory of the Lord will be revealed. The King, omniscient and omnipotent – all-knowing and all-powerful – comes to us with His grace, promising forgiveness for our sins, peace with God, and the guarantee of everlasting life for all who believe. There's no message that could be more comforting for us poor sinners; and since "the mouth of the Lord has spoken it," it's reliable and trustworthy.

But, comforting as it is, this message carries with it a serious warning, which was proclaimed to people long ago. It was applicable then and it's just as fitting now, if not more so. As we prepare for the festival of our Savior's birth, we come to the realization that the season of Advent is not only a joyous one, an exciting one filled with glorious anticipation; it's also a very serious one for those preparing to receive the Son of God in the flesh.

Our focus, then, for the next few minutes, will be turned to the admonition of our text: "Prepare the way of the Lord!"

In today's Old Testament the prophet hears a voice crying in the wilderness:



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“Prepare the way of the Lord.” The glory of the Lord will be revealed. In other words, the Lord is coming to His people to shower on them His forgiving grace, and the people are to prepare the way for Him, so that they may be ready when He comes. Of course, from our perspective, we know this prophecy has already been fulfilled. Shortly before Jesus inaugurated His public ministry, there arose in the wilderness just such a voice: John the Baptist.

His clothes and diet showed that he was an extraordinary man. He wore a garment of camel’s hair, and his food was locusts and wild honey. He was a preacher of repentance. He pointed to Jesus as the Messiah and called people to repentance.

Such preaching was necessary in his day. As Scripture says: “[The Lord] came to His own, and His own people didn’t receive Him” (John 1:11). Does anyone need proof of this? Think of that night in Bethlehem, when Joseph and Mary went there according to an imperial decree and the Child Jesus was about to be born. What does Scripture tell us? “There was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7b). During the reign of that monster Herod the holy family had to flee to Egypt. When Jesus began His public ministry and preached that the Kingdom of God was at hand, He was hated, despised, and abused by the elders of the people, the leaders of the church: the Sadducees and Pharisees, the scribes and priests. Not only that – He was persecuted and finally nailed to a cross. His people were spiritually dead and dry as a desert. They clothed themselves in garments of pride and self-righteousness. They wanted and waited for an earthly savior, someone who would deliver them from the Roman yoke of slavery, re-establish the throne of David, and make them a world power again. A Savior from sin and death was incomprehensible to them. Only a few – a very few – were waiting for the consolation of Israel, a Redeemer from sin, death, and the devil. Surely, the preaching of repentance had its place in John the Baptist’s day.

But what about today? In this “enlightened” age of ours, the call to repentance is all the more necessary. And it’s during this season of Advent, as the world is preparing for the glad “season of giving,” that the cry in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord,” must again be sounded. Beloved, hear me: Prepare yourselves in true repentance to receive the Christ Child! The glory of the Lord will be revealed. During this new church year the message of God’s infinite love for us, as it was made known in the birth of Jesus Christ, will be proclaimed in all its sweetness. But we dare never ignore the preaching of true repentance. For only after the message of repentance has taken root in our hearts are we ready for the Gospel message of the glory of the Lord.

Sadly, by nature, our hearts are not prepared to receive the Lord. Our hearts are carnal; they love the things of this world; they seek satisfaction and contentment in temporal things; they crave the vanities of life. Make no mistake, our sinful nature certainly welcomes a savior who’s able to bring earthly joys, to deliver us from the woes and sorrows of life, who will acknowledge our human dignity, our pride, and our worthiness. But a Savior who comes to seek and save sinful human beings from the agony of eternal



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punishment by suffering and dying – no, this One is not wanted; a Savior such as this is to our sinful nature a rock of stumbling and a stone of offense (Rom. 9:33). When the Savior from sin is proclaimed to our sinful hearts, we want nothing to do with Him. Our sinful nature must first hear the Law of God preached in all its severity. Then, and only then, will it soften and become fertile soil for the Gospel.

But the Advent admonition: “Prepare the way of the Lord,” is necessary not just to prepare sinful hearts to receive the Gospel, but also for those of us who already cling to the cross of Christ, inasmuch as we, too, are sinful human beings and continue to be plagued by an inclination to wander from the Faith. Yes, we’re already redeemed from our sins; yes, we’re already basking in the warmth of God’s undeserved grace, but our faith walk is not always – or maybe even *ever* – what God wants it to be. Each of us still has within us a goodly share of the old Adam, that old sinful nature, which tends to set impediments at the door of our hearts, blocking the Lord’s access to the deepest recesses of our souls. Even for the most faithful Christian, there’s that part of us that we hold back, that we keep closed even to God. Therefore, we, too, must be reminded to “prepare the way of the Lord.”

“But Pastor,” you may be thinking, “how do we do this? How do we prepare sufficiently for the coming of the Lord?” With man this is impossible, but not with God (Mark 10:27). Our text mentions three ways by which the Lord prepares us for His coming.

First of all: “Every mountain and hill will be made low.” These mountains and hills represent self-righteousness. A heart that prides itself in its good works and virtues, even those we might call “Christian” works and virtues – such as: attending worship, praying, doing works of charity – a heart that thinks itself worthy based on these, is not prepared to receive the King of Glory. All such mountains and hills must be made low, they must be leveled. Only when we acknowledge our incapacity to earn favor with God and our desperate need of His grace and mercy, will our hearts be prepared to receive Him.

Secondly, because our sinful hearts are not only proud and deceitful, but also desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9), it’s necessary that “every valley shall be lifted up.” As far as our own good works are concerned, they’re no help at all. With all of them combined, we may as well give up and sink into hopeless despair. But we don’t have to stand on our works to be saved! We have a Savior! Scripture says that “He was made to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). He is indeed the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), and His blood cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

Beloved, do you find yourself in the valley of doubt and despair because of your sins? Remember that it is everlastingly true: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow” (Is. 1:18). Don’t let despair over your sins get the best of you, but, rather, lift up your head. “Behold, your King comes to you!” (Zech. 9:9) He comes to cleanse you from all unrighteousness; He comes to heal all your diseases. Receive Him in true faith, and let Him replace your despair with comfort, peace, and joy.



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Finally, not only will the high be made low and the low made high, but “the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.” “Uneven ground” represents duplicity and hypocrisy, so these words point to the fruits of repentance. True repentance always brings forth a change in a person’s life – a change produced by the Word and Spirit of God. For the repentant sinner the Word of God is a lamp to his feet and a light to his path (Ps. 119:105). In other words, this change doesn’t take place simply because a person “tries real hard” or “wants it bad enough.” Our lives begin to reflect the will of God as we take advantage of the opportunities He gives to access the Means by which He enacts and empowers the change in us. His Holy Word and Sacraments, “level” our ground, so to speak, because they cause our faith to be exhibited more and more in the way we live.

And, while this change doesn’t make us any more saved than we were before – any more bound for heaven than we were before – it’s not without its benefits. God uses this change as a testimony of faith to others and as a comfort to us. Others will notice this change perhaps before we do, and they may think, “If God can make such a change in them, maybe He can make a change in me.” And the more harmony that exists between what we believe and what we do, the more confidence *we* have that our faith is genuine and our comfort is increased when we see in our own lives the good works God is producing in us (Eph. 2:10).

God help us all this season to take to heart the Advent admonition: “Prepare the way of the Lord,” that we may, by the blessed Means of Grace, truly be prepared to receive our Savior. In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen