Sermons at Christ Church

Building Relationships Through Love.

Advent 2
Rev. Emmanuel Mercer

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." John proclaimed by the Jordan. John is the one whom the prophet Isaiah said would invite all of us to prepare ourselves for the coming kingdom and he's now sounding the alarm-prepare the way of the Lord. John is like an emergency vehicle with blazing sirens. When you hear the siren sound from a distance, you prepare to pull over.

As many of you know, we have a faulty sprinkler system leading to a church flood about 5 years ago. I wasn't in town when the flood occurred, but the alarm calls on my phone alerted me to the fact that something had gone terribly wrong.

John was the alarm bell, the spiritual siren who sounded the alarm-the kingdom of heaven is near, prepare the way for it. We prepare for the coming kingdom by preparing yourselves.

Three ways in which we can prepare ourselves. First, we prepare ourselves with an honest acknowledgement of who we are. I believe that an important part of our spiritual discipline is our ability to be honest. Honesty is the first effort on the path of repentance and recovery, and honesty with ourselves is the first step that each of us must take if we are to make progress.

What makes the gospel story so profound for me is that both Pharisees and Sadducees, religious leaders who were considered righteous approached John for the baptism of repentance. Yes, John scolded them, but what I find remarkable about the step that they took was their honest admission of who they were. That, even though they were considered righteous, deep within them, they also needed as much repentance as the people they led. That to me is progress.

Their willingness to offer themselves for the baptism of repentance tells a much broader story about the human condition-all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. For that reason, Advent not only reminds us about our sinfulness, but it invites us to a hope embedded in repentance and the life-giving nature of being in reconciled with God.

The repentance to which Advent invites us isn't only about turning away from past ways, but it is about doing December differently. Instead of being consumed by the chaos of the holidays, Advent invites us to bring our longings, our hopes and our fears by the River Jordan where God awaits us with a different kind of message.

Second, preparing the way of the Lord would mean accepting that we are broken people, in broken relationships living in broken societies. And our brokenness not only magnifies our need for repentance, but it cries out for mending.

For that reason, coming to repentance should be part of our daily walk with God. And because it is a walk grounded in honesty, there should be no shame in coming to repentance. Each of those people who went to John to seek the baptism of repentance remind us of two things, first, human brokenness and second, the human longing for reconciliation with God.

I believe that our individual lives with God is like a cycle. Our brokenness leads us on the wrong path, and when we realize that we are on the wrong path and call to mind the infinite mercies of God, and we repent of our sins, God forgives and restores us. Ours is one of a continual fellowship with God marked by sin, repentance, forgiveness, restoration and reconciliation.

Advent reminds us that repentance and reconciliation is not only available but that they are the very reason and purpose of the coming kingdom. Advent therefore invites us to constantly re-evaluate God's place in our lives, and to ask whether we are ready to hear again the words of the prophet crying out in the wilderness-prepare the way of the Lord.

Lastly, preparing the way of the Lord would not only be about believing in God's vision of a new world, but by actively working towards that vision. It is a vision about a world that looks like the Garden of Eden before the Fall. It is such a sublime vision, but we can't see it because of our crippling fear of inadequacies and impossibilities.

But it is possible. Here is a part of a poem about possibilities. The poem 'Orville' by Rudy Francisco captures a communication between the Wright brothers-Wilbur and Orville, the night before their first flight:

Brother,
last week, I overheard a joke:
What do you call
Two men who think they can fly?

A funeral.
To be honest, I didn't think it was funny either.

The whole town has become
an ocean of pointed fingers.

People I once called friends
are now just a tidal wave of unsolicited advice.
They're trying to rinse out the color from our dreams.

Yesterday, a lady from church pulled me aside
and said,
If God wanted us in the sky,
He would have given us wings.

And I replied, *Isn't that what imagination is?*
The act of actually going somewhere
that others can only think of?

Brother, sometimes,
people who have never even tried to run a mile
will tell you that a marathon is too far.

Some people will try to talk you out
of jumping into the water

simply because they have
always been too scared to learn how to swim.

Fear is when the brain digs out all faith from the body
and then calls it survival.

Fear is when we turn up the volume on
everything that might go wrong
and then allow it to speak louder than our courage.

But for those who do not worship at the altar of panic,
for those who will not sacrifice their ambitions
to a demigod of worst-case scenarios,
for those who do not give up,
failure is just a short story they tell
before they talk about success.

I know this process has been difficult.
The miscalculations, the hours we've put in,
the days we spend away from our families.

But every time I walk outside,
I can feel the ground getting nervous,
like it knows it cannot keep us here much longer
because we are destined for a higher calling.

I hear them say *it's impossible*,
but I say *everything is until it's not*.

Advent is about the possibilities of something new.
Advent is about the possibilities of human redemption. Advent is about the belief in a higher calling.
Advent is about knowing you too can fly.
Advent is about anticipating an explosion that makes a new creation possible.

Here's what the prophet Isaiah says:
The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

This feels like such an impossible world to behold because it is beyond what we are used to. But it is possible. If only we can let go of the destructive emotions that hold us captive. If only we can let go of the vision of the world where might is right.

The world we have constructed for ourselves can crumble or stand, not because of how perfect it is, but because we believe in progress, we believe that every little step we take leads us to conquer our fears of an impossible world and makes real and tangible God's vision for the world.

If Advent is to create a new sense of meaning for us, then it is one where we will have to open our ears to the constant drum beat of John's words "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near" But know this, repentance isn't a one day event, repentance is an ongoing process to which we must commit ourselves-and our commitment to this process should be part of our daily renewal.

There's a story of a lady who bought an economy plane ticket for a round trip to Indiana. When she got on the plane, she sat on an open seat in the first class. An attendant came by and gently asked her to move to the economy cabin. She simply responded 'I bought a ticket to Indiana and I am going to Indiana.'

When she realized that she wasn't going to get anywhere with her, she reached out to her colleague. When he came and asked the lady to move, she offered the same response 'I bought a ticket to Indiana, and I am going to Indiana.'

When he realized that he also wasn't going to get anywhere with her, he went to the cockpit and called the junior pilot. When he politely asked the lady to move to the economy cabin, she offered the same response 'I bought a ticket to Indiana, and I am going to Indiana.' He returned back to the cockpit and told the other pilot.

The pilot went over, whispered something in her ears and then with glee the woman stood up and went to economy cabin. The junior pilot was utterly surprised; how did you do it? Well, I just told her that those sitting at first class, where she's sitting are not going to Indiana.

If you believe, like I do, that each moment of our life is sacred, then you must realize that the coming kingdom of God is the only kingdom that you and I can see because that's is the only kingdom that is possible. And it is a kingdom where each of us is called to be the mother of God, because not only are you pregnant with God, but God is also always waiting to be born. How ready are you to give birth to the new creation that is alive within you? How ready are you to make everything new with God? How ready are you to welcome the kingdom of heaven?

John's alarm bells are ringing. Maybe, if we turn our ears just a little bit, we may hear Advent's refrain, repent for the kingdom of God is near. God is waiting for us by the Jordan-not to hear our confessions but to restore our hope. **Amen.**