

**SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 4, 2011**

"EVERYTHING WE PREPARE FOR"

**THE REV. MARK P. BRUESEHOFF
ST. JOHN, OCEAN CITY, NJ**

Advent is God's Good News: EVERYTHING WE PREPARE FOR IS BORN ANEW!

And our prayer for today is: PREPARE US, O GOD, FOR PEACE! The Psalm from last Sunday, Psalm 80, and the Psalm for this Sunday, Psalm 85, both contain the word "RESTORE." The suggestion in both of these Psalms is that we have a spiritual hunger within us. Once upon a time we knew a very precious truth that has somehow slipped from our hearts and our minds.

The truth is we spend a lot of time searching in the dark, hoping to find a light that will reveal the meaning of life, or a lantern that will light our path. What we need is the Savior, the Light of the World, to come to us and reveal the truth, and perhaps to remind us that the treasure we have been looking for, is not the true treasure at all.

Last Sunday was "EVERYTHING WE HOPE FOR." Today is "EVERYTHING WE PREPARE FOR." Last Sunday after worship my family and I spent the afternoon working in the yard to remove all the leaves. YES, we were cleaning up the yard to make it look better. But we were also cleaning up the yard to prepare for the outdoor decorations, that will be going up soon. (God willing!)

And the more I thought about what we were doing, the more I connected it to this Sunday, where two times we hear that cry to PREPARE. We hear it in our First Lesson. The prophet Isaiah is announcing to the people of Israel that their hope is restored. Their return to the Promised Land is more than just a place on the map. Their return to the Promised Land is a return to the arms of a loving God who has promised to be their God no matter what! And in contrast to the Promised Land, is the wilderness from which they are returning. They must prepare themselves for the return to faith in the promises of God. So the prophet cries out, *"IN THE WILDERNESS PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE STRAIGHT IN THE DESERT A HIGHWAY FOR OUR GOD."*

We hear the cry to PREPARE again in the Gospel. The words of the prophet Isaiah are fulfilled in the life and preaching and teaching of the one who comes to announce the Savior's arrival. John The Baptist, who has come to Baptize with water, is announcing the coming of the one who will Baptize with the Holy Spirit. And we hear the words of the prophet fulfilled: *"SEE, I AM SENDING MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY; THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING OUT IN THE WILDERNESS: 'PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.'"*

PREPARE THE WAY! Clean up all the stuff that gets in the way of angels making an announcement to Mary. Clean up all the stuff that gets in the way of Joseph taking Mary as his wife, to give birth to a Child that is not his. Clean up all the stuff that gets in the way of the shepherds who receive the surprise of their lives in the form of a birth announcement brought to them by an angel and a host of the heavenly choir. Clean up all the stuff that gets in the way of the Wise Men going the distance to worship the newborn King. And clean up all the stuff that gets in the way of our celebration of LIFE and HOPE and JOY and FAITH and LOVE. It's like cleaning up the yard! Getting rid of all the stuff that has fallen and is getting in the way of seeing the real beauty of what is there. It's cleaning up, to be ready for what is coming.

Last week we focused on the HOPE of Advent. Today we focus on the PREPARATION of Advent. It's all about PREPARING for PEACE. Psalm 85 begins with a line that was spoken by the people of Israel on their return from exile in Babylon: "You have been gracious to Your land, O Lord." The people are thankful that their captivity is over, and that God has forgiven their sins.

BUT SOMETHING IS STILL MISSING!

The empty place in their life, was just like the feeling that we have after earning a degree, after starting a new job, after moving into a bigger house, after driving that new car for a while, after reaching a goal that we have worked long and hard to get to. We know how blessed we are! But like any new toy, after a while it just isn't new anymore. And by then something better has come along. And then we begin to wonder why it is not enough! Saint Augustine had it right when he said, "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

True peace will escape us until our restless hearts come to rest in God. Peace cannot be received by a diploma, a promotion, or a Lexus in the driveway with a big red bow. Peace comes as a gift from God. Peace starts with the forgiveness of sin and the Savior who puts us right with God.

The only way to PREPARE is to receive and to open the PEACE PACKAGE that comes from God. When God sends a peace package the box is not empty. Psalm 85 tells us that our Lord will "speak peace to His people." He calls us to turn to Him "in our hearts." God's peace package contains more than meets the eye. Packed into this box is the best of what God has to offer: unending love and faithfulness, righteousness and goodness. And so it is impossible for peace to be, unless there is first the PREPARATION that must be done. And we PREPARE with justice and righteousness.

As one American leader said in the mid-20th century, "*PEACE AND JUSTICE ARE TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN.*" That speaker was not a peace activist or a hippie radical. It was Dwight Eisenhower, five-star general and President of the United States. Peace and justice are two sides of the same coin. And this is God's peace package that we need to carry into our world.

When we tear open this package, we find the gift of God Himself. The very same God who sent His angels to announce a birth; who sent His Son to be born among us, as one of us; who gave up the life of His Son, so that we might find peace in the arms of a loving God!

We need this gift now more than ever, because we are not going to find peace by shopping at the mall or online. Economic recovery is moving slowly! Our material worth will not carry us into the future! Advanced degrees, well-paying jobs, bigger houses, and fancy cars remain out of reach for many Americans! But no value and no price can be put on God's gift of peace. God's peace is our NON-MATERIAL WEALTH. Did you hear that? Nonmaterial wealth! You won't find that in the Neiman Marcus catalog!

EVERYTHING WE PREPARE FOR is the gift of Jesus at Christmas!

PREPARE THE WAY! Extend the gift of love to someone who is unloved! Practice faithfulness with family and friend! Show righteousness in our schools and workplaces! Work for peace in our relationships! If we PREPARE to make peace real in our lives, this will turn out to be our best Christmas ever.

Into the stillness of a Bethlehem night, God came, God spoke.

Restore us, O God, to hope.

Restore us, O God, to peace.

Restore us, O God.

And all God's children say:

Amen.

Sola Deo Gloria!