

**Second Sunday in Advent, 6 December 2020**  
**Isaiah 40:1-11, 2 Peter 3:8-14, Mark 1:1-8**

It had been years since she came to church. She wasn't sure about how to act...or what to wear. When she was young, her mother always wore a hat when she went to church. It was somehow required. Even if it was only a little pill hat. But she realized that not too many women wore hats to church anymore.

So she didn't know what to wear.

But this Sunday was going to be special. After all these years, she had decided to go to church again. She had decided that Christmas Eve would be a great time, because she might not even be noticed if the church was crowded. And she had a little anxiety.

So, as she was preparing, she had supper alone...at 5:00. When she was done, she went upstairs to take a shower. Normally that was something she might have done only every two or three days, but this was a special occasion. And the shower felt good.

Maybe she might even put on a little perfume.

Isn't it interesting how much preparation people do, at least on the outside, when going to church for the first time... or for a first date.... or for a party.

And when she got to church, she noticed how much times had changed. Some for the good, and some for the not so good.

But the main thing she noticed was that the people weren't as concerned about the outward preparations as they once were. Oh, they were clean and all that. But there was someone wearing jeans...and she was sitting next to someone in a dress.

And then the pastor started talking about how we prepare for this day. He said Christmas is the day that we celebrate the coming of the messiah.

She left that evening wondering about all the preparations that she had done. Whether or not instead of the preparations on the outside, she should have prepared herself differently somehow.

That internal preparation is what Isaiah is addressing in our first reading today. And you know, our focus, at least for the beginning of Advent is not mainly on the coming of the Christ Child. That is celebrated December 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>. No, we are focused on Jesus will return.

So how do you prepare for Christ's return? Certainly not just by appearances...but How? Prepare by understanding your frailty.

I went out earlier this week to our playground. There were no flowers I found there, but I grabbed this dead branch. The grass withers, the flower fades....and tree branches also become dead.

This is a reminder as all these joyful songs ring in our ears of the shortness of life. We are reminded of the 6 year old who is struck by a car...whose driver did not see him as he ran out in to the street. We are reminded of the 94 year old who was healthy a week earlier, but also has passed.

The grass withers and the flower fades away. Surely the people are like grass. Not just death though. We are frail creatures.

Earlier in the week, I had to have a coat to go outside. Don't believe me how frail we are – just get a scanner and listen to all the things the police and ambulances are responding to. Listen to how frail we are, when you hear what they are responding to.

We are physically frail. That is a sign of a greater frailty. One that John the Baptizer spoke to. Repent is the word he used. Over and over again he repeated – repent.

Or as another John wrote in the Bible, “If anyone claims to be without sin, he deceives himself, and the truth is not in him...but if we confess our sins...”

Repent.

As the body suffers wounds and gets blown around, so the soul does without protection by the wounds of sin.

Naked...by ourselves, we would fall into every self-centered whim that would destroy this frail soul.

Prepare for Christ's second coming...prepare by knowing what is greater than you. By what is able to shield you from the cold winds to the soul.

What is able to shield you from the cold winds to the soul....as a coat does when you go outside? “But the Word of God remains FOREVER!!!!”

Isaiah did his writing some 600 years before the coming of Jesus. And here God's word endured....pointing to.....showing...the first coming of Jesus.

The promise of Christ's return endures. “A day for the Lord is like a thousand years” When Peter says that, it is not a cop out. Rather it is knowing that this word is greater than you.

A holocaust survivor, who became a psychiatrist, Victor Frankl believe that all of the answers for people's problems are found in finding meaning and purpose. That is our ultimate quest. He said that if all was missing, simply knowing, “there is no God but the Lord, and He is one” would be sufficient. Because there is where we learn of the one who is greater than us. And that is the ultimate truth.

A truth that we know from the one whose word endures forever. In the Gospel of John, we learn that that Word of God is Jesus himself. This is the eternal Word, which we have the privilege of know...will come again.

Prepare for the return of Jesus. Prepare by knowing that God comes to deliver us.

The first word that starts this section of Isaiah is Comfort. By the way, this is a scripture often read at someone's ordination.

Comfort is the word he says to a nation that has been under captivity for 60 years. Comfort. Comfort to those that he says received double punishment for their sins....for the things they did wrong. That is to say they were treated very harshly.

He is telling them, you might not see the delivery in your own lifetime. God is the deliverer. And we know that in Christ's return, God is the deliverer

Thorough John the Baptizer, God came to deliver...to set free.

And what kind of delivery did he bring? Notice who were his main followers – prostitutes, tax collectors, and those labeled great sinners. Freedom from all our addiction – including the addiction to self.

These were the ones who saw their own soul's frailty. These were the ones delivered.  
God comes to deliver.

In the first coming of Christ, he brought deliverance from sin and death.

We have been waiting long. "Come thou long expected Jesus". Come....you have set us free from sin and death – but come to reign forever.

So prepare for Christ's return by knowing the God that come to deliver you.

Prepare for the coming of Christ, by knowing that God's wish is greater than your expectation.

There was a man who was on his way to become a businessman. In his day, he would have been in a profession that would have made him what we would call upper middle class.

His father and mother were proud, and wanted to hand the business over to him.

They had their dreams for him, and he had them for himself as well. But God had a greater vision for him. God would give him something much more than he could have ever expected.

We know his name as Peter...and he was a fisherman – a merchant in his day. He would have lived a life that would have been forgotten...but he became much more.

That is what is true for each of us. God has greater things for each of us than we could ever expect ourselves.

No you might not become famous – but you see, God has a vision for you greater than your expectation – know that is true and claim it.

A final part of preparation that John the Baptizer was living in the desert for....That Isaiah was speaking about....prepare by giving yourself to what endures forever.

When all is said and done it means nothing if all this preparation remains only something in your head.

I remember a woman I met when we were preparing for Desert Storm. She said, "I don't care who your God is, but will He do anything for you when you are on the battlefield."

She then began to talk of her husband, who was in a local hospital. He had what they called full depth burns. I usually call those 3<sup>rd</sup> degree burns. His whole body was burned. In his pain, as the statements about the flesh withering was very visible in his body...He said his God was with him in that battlefield.

He knew that in the Word of God he too, would live forever.

Prepare this day for Christmas, with all the celebration. And prepare for the Second Advent of Jesus, and that celebration as well.

Amen.