

Pastor Colleen's Sermon of December 6, 2009

Grace, Peace and Mercy be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

In his book **Anam Cara**, the author John O'Donohue has a section called "The Mystery of Approach"

In this section he talks about the idea for a short story where you would approach only one person in the course of your life.

He says that you'd have to take out the biological considerations in order for this imaginary world to exist

But in this world you would have to practice years of silence before you could even begin to approach the presence of this other person.

The whole idea that this author is trying to present is that to approach another person is an act of reverence that requires preparation.

As we have been thrust into the Advent season with all of its celebrations and holiday gatherings I am intrigued by this idea.

Because most of us cross paths with so many people in the course of our life that we often forget that to encounter someone, to truly meet another, is a sacred act.

Given how many people we come into contact with just in the course of a day, it's easy to overlook the way in which coming into the presence of another person a being who is created in the likeness of God is a sacrament and a wonder.

Maybe the only time we really get close to recognizing the holiness and sacredness of that moment is when we hold a new born baby in our arms.

In that moment of first meeting,

Often we are simply struck silent by the sheer wonder of this new little child of God

Often it is one of the few moments where we truly feel the sacredness of this meeting of another.

This week, John the Baptist, along with his predecessor Isaiah,

is calling us to remember what it means to prepare to encounter another:

in this case, of course, we are to prepare to come into the presence of one who is not just created in the image of God but who is God.

How do we ready ourselves for this sacrament, this mystery, this miracle?

Amid all of the complexities and grace involved in being who God has created and called us to be,

how do we make a space for the One who desires to approach and meet us in this and every season?

Well John the Baptist tells us the first steps...

Repent and prepare

Today John the Baptist cries out Isaiah's words to Prepare the way.

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But how do we do that?

Well, first of all...

Think about what you do when you prepare your house for a guest.

Preparing for company often causes us to look around our homes and examine them with a whole new perspective

We look around our houses with new eyes.

We clear away the clutter,

We clean things off,

And we make things look like new.

In your own way, some of you have been preparing for Christmas for several weeks.

That's why you've been so busy.

Hanging lights, buying gifts, planning parties, writing cards and all the rest of the tasks that go with this hectic time of the year.

The trappings of Christmas are everywhere.

Much planning, much preparation goes into this sacred holiday.

But, of course, trimming trees, writing cards and buying gifts is not the kind of preparation John has in mind.

The preparation he is calling for is much more profound.

It is the preparation of the inner person.

We need to prepare our hearts.

We need to look within.

The message of the prophet is one of repentance,
of turning toward God.

And one of the ways we turn toward God and prepare our hearts is by gathering as the assembled people of God here in this place on both Sundays and at our mid-week services.

This is where we get the strength, the guidance, the forgiveness, the reminders, and the resources to Prepare.

We gather together to find a different kind of beauty,
a quieter, more reflective time,

where we are immersed in shadows and light,

where we light one more candle on the wreath each week...

where we hear stories of prophets like Mary and Elizabeth, Isaiah and Zechariah,

all of whom speak passionately and eloquently,

of God's salvation about to break into the world,

delivering us from sin and making us – "the whole world" –

a whole and holy people.

You see that is really the beauty of Advent.

While we shop, trim the tree, and plan parties,

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While we are caught up in the rush of the season...

the church is preparing, too,
not for a holiday but **for a holy day**.

As a community of faith, we are preparing the way for the Christ Child to come not only into our homes but into our hearts as well.

We are preparing for the coming of Christ,
the Word made flesh,
into the *world* again,
bearing hope and good news,
forgiveness and peace.

This is no ordinary guest that we are preparing for

This is a guest who wants to live in our hearts forever

This is the birth of our Savior who reigns in our hearts and lives forever.

It is a sacred meeting and John is telling us to take our preparation seriously.

Luke's words for today set us in a particular time and a particular place.

The reader and listener find themselves with John in the wilderness after being told about the world around them.

And, John is proclaiming that the particular world in which Luke has just placed us is about to change.

And even though the words here are John's and the time is long ago,
the message does not change.

The world is crooked, and it can be made straight.

Those who are empty can be filled.

Those who are high shall be brought low.

The rough ways will be made smooth.

And, the natural world, the world as we know it, the world we are surrounded by,
will change by our actions of love.

We will be ready for the day of Christ and we will be ready to see the salvation of God.

Advent is a season of preparation because

Christmas is not just the celebration of the birth of a baby;

it is the beginning of a chain of events that transforms human existence.

Christmas is not just recognizing God's gift of the Incarnation –

it is also our acknowledgment of what this Incarnation now means for every man, woman and child.

That's how John ends his proclamation...

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God

What Good news, not just for them, long ago,

but for us, and for the world God loves.

Good news, powerful enough to change our lives, and that world as well.

So this Advent....

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Prepare the way

Come away and be still and prepare to meet the most spectacular someone you've ever encountered...

Change your direction....

listen to John and celebrate that Christ,
the salvation of God,
is coming.

Christ is coming and the world is going to be dramatically and forever changed

Hear the voice and be comforted and lifted by John's message of hope and light.

Let God fill the desert places of your life

And then, like John, go out from this place and witness to the world,

that one is coming who brings hope, forgiveness and healing for the world.

Shout it from the mountaintops,

Proclaim it through the valleys,

Listen to the voice and prepare the way.

Amen

May the peace of God which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen