

Daily Discipleship

Second Sunday of Advent (A) – Matthew 3:1-12

Discipleship: *Following the Lord*

Focus Question: *How do you prepare a place for the Lord in your life?*

word of life

“In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’ This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, ‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” Matthew 3:1-3 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 3:1-12

John the Baptist is a well-known personality of the New Testament. He passionately and clearly urges people to prepare for the coming of the Lord. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” (John 3:2 NRSV) These are the same words used by Jesus to begin his own ministry. (Matthew 4:17)

After spending time in the wilderness, John enters the scene as one who has just left the rugged life of the wilderness to begin his preaching. People from Jerusalem, Judea, and the whole region come to the Jordan River to hear him and to be baptized by him.

1. *Describe the physical appearance of John the Baptist.*
2. *What might be the first impression of John the Baptist?*

John offers a baptism of repentance. Repent means to change one’s mind and direction in life. People confess their sin and make a commitment to live differently. To reflect this change, John uses water to cleanse the outer body and symbolically cleanse the inner spirit. A person coming out of the water could begin a new pattern of living, wet and clean.

3. *How can water help you feel clean on the inside?*
4. *How is the baptism by John the Baptist and by Jesus different from each other?*
5. *What was attractive about John’s message?*

John is not trying to get glory or increase his own status. He does not pamper nor manipulate anyone into being baptized. Instead, John preaches with vigor and force, especially when he sees the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to be baptized. John proclaims, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance.” (Matthew 3:8 NRSV) John knows he is not worthy to carry the sandals of Jesus, the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

6. *What might have been the reaction of the Pharisees and Sadducees?*
7. *Why is John angry?*
8. *Why could not John have looked the other way and said nothing?*

John is concerned about rituals which have no meaning behind them. He calls for repentance – changed behavior. Each person is to turn and face God in new ways, not relying on family connections of the past. That family connection includes Abraham. John’s words are strong, but he believes the ax is already at the tree. It is *almost too late*. He knows the tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

9. *What is John warning the people about?*
10. *Rephrase Matthew 3:7-10 and put these verses in your own words.*

John understands the urgency of people preparing for the coming of the Lord. Be prepared!

word among us

The car accident came out of nowhere. Quickly cars piled up as drivers tried to avoid hitting cars and being hit by others. Fortunately and miraculously no one was seriously hurt. It took a while for the police to sort out the accident. Everyone was instructed to sit patiently and wait for the police to dismiss the drivers.

As Benjamin waited to be dismissed from the accident, he found himself shaking inside. He knew he had barely escaped a horrific accident. As he waited, he found himself sorting out priorities. The longer he waited, the clearer was his thinking. It was time to make some changes in his life. He was ready to face a new direction. This time, God would be included in his plans. This time, Benjamin would not just think of himself first. This time. . .

1. *What helped Benjamin to think so clearly?*
2. *When have you found yourselves at a crossroads?*

John the Baptist is well-known for his fiery preaching as he attempted to call people to repent and turn towards God. John wanted changed behavior.

3. *Who in your life has called you to repent?*
4. *Whom do you call to repent - to face a new direction?*

John was encouraging people to prepare a pathway for the Lord. This image from Old Testament reminds us of days of poor roads and the work needed to prepare a road worthy of royalty. Today, we often think of preparing spiritually for the Lord to come into our hearts and lives. Certainly, we recognize the potholes and detours we have taken while on this earth.

Hopefully, preparing a pathway for the Lord is a positive thing, if we believe the Lord brings good to those who are open and ready to receive the kingdom of God, then, let us be eager to remove the barriers which prevent us from knowing the Lord.

5. *What does it mean for you to prepare for the Lord?*
6. *What good things come to a person who prepares for the Lord?*

John issues a warning to all. "For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham." (Matthew 3:8 NRSV) All things are possible with God. That's good news. We are not called to produce bountiful harvest, but to bear fruit. It is God who blesses our fruit and multiplies the harvest. We will never be fully prepared for the coming of the Lord, but we can daily repent and turn towards Christ each day of our lives.

7. *How do you bear fruit?*
8. *How might God multiply the harvest?*

Prayer

Lord, help me to see those barriers which block me from you and remove them. Help me to prepare for your coming. Amen

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 11:1-10

last word

Find 5 stones.

Identify each stone as one of the barriers which block you from the Lord.

Find a way to remove that barrier.



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

Copyright © 2007 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

May be reproduced for local, non-sale use provided the above copyright notice is included.

www.elca.org/evangelizingchurch/dailydiscipleship

2 Advent (A) Page 2 of 2