

## ***Repent, for the Kingdom is at Hand***

The camel's hair, leather belt, locusts and wild honey – the wilderness – the water and the Word that is preached --- all this points to John as a prophet, the Lord's prophet. What appears to us as an odd man, is the Lord's way of telling us to pay attention – the Lord is speaking to you!

And what does the Lord have to say to this gathering of His beloved children? “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” With every tick of the clock – with every step He takes – Jesus is “at hand,” bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to you.

Another prophet, Isaiah, also speaks of this Jesus who is coming to you – saying – “The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.”

Jesus is FULL of the Holy Spirit. Why? Because the Holy Spirit “will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” Indeed, God the Father sends the Son, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from them – to judge the living and the dead – to call sinners to repentance.

Whether we say it, or think it, everyday we realize that we are “busy” people – too busy! Running around like chickens with their heads cut off – we rarely stop to think about God's judgment upon us. And yet, when it does cross our minds – our words and actions show that we are keenly interested in His current assessment.

Do you want to know what God is thinking – how He views you? Do you wonder what the final outcome will be for you – what God might have to say about all your failures? Do you fear it might end badly for you?

Then listen to what the Holy Spirit has to say. “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” – Jesus comes to you – to rule over you – to rule over your life.

God the Holy Spirit preaches through His servant John the Baptist – whose unique role is “to prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.”

What's not unique is the sermon – we've heard it before – from John, and from the prophets who have come before him. One of the main points of this sermon – to borrow language from Isaiah – is that you are a dead stump.

We probably have plenty of stumps out in the church yard from dead trees that have been cut down. Like Israel before us – who hardened her heart – we have become calloused to the Word of the Lord – hollowed out, rotted, gutted by sin. Hearts petrified, like stone.

Go out in the church yard and see if you can imagine a tree growing up from one of those dead stumps. And yet, the Holy Spirit preaches that there is hope. Isaiah preaches the Lord's promise into ears that hear – “there shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse.”

There is hope for dead stumps. There is hope, because “God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.” The Apostle Paul preaches the same sermon in the Epistle – “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”

Do you ever get frustrated with people because they keep doing the same things over and over again? Wouldn't you love to be able to flip open their heads and flip a few switches in order to change the way they are thinking?

When the Lord preaches repentance – the word literally means the “changing of the mind, or way of thinking.” But this is not some kind of lobotomy – a physiological, philosophical, or academic exercise. The preaching of repentance is God putting to death and resurrecting to life – changing the way you believe – about your sin, and about God and His forgiveness.

I sometimes refer to repentance as “spotlight preaching” – spotlighting you and your sin – and spotlighting Christ and His forgiveness.

When you are burdened with guilt over your sin – when you fear that the Lord has rightly turned His back on you – then you know the Holy Spirit has been spotlighting you with God's Law. He does this so that you will long for relief, cry out for help – and then the Holy Spirit holds before your eyes, Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

That's what the Holy Spirit is doing through John – wielding a bright spotlight – exposing sin – and then like one of those big arrow signs, screaming to you ----- here is your SAVIOR ----- here is your SALVATION!

Preaching – the Word of God – the Holy Spirit --- they all go together. God the Holy Spirit is at work through the preaching of God's Word to gather believers who trust in Jesus for their salvation. Today is the Advent of our God – the Holy Spirit coming to you – repenting you, changing your mind, leading you to trust in Jesus Christ alone.

He cuts you down to size with the Law so that you confess what is true – that you are by nature a dead stump – that all the good things you like to offer up to God to impress Him and sway His judgment – are but chaff to be burned up with fire.

And yet, there is hope for you – for the Holy Spirit gathers you to Jesus today who rules over your sin with His forgiveness. The kingdom is at hand – for you. Christ your Savior baptizes you with “the Holy Spirit and with fire” – so that you may believe your sin has been consumed by Christ – and you are cleansed, and holy in His sight.

Even now you “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” when you come and kneel before the Lord – bowing your head, offering your neck as one who deserves to have it lopped off – and lifting your head to receive your salvation, the very Body and Blood of Christ.

What a glorious thing this repentance is – the Holy Spirit uniting you to Jesus by faith – preaching the Last Day judgment of forgiveness into your ears this day.

Throughout these Advent days, God the Holy Spirit keeps you in the one true faith – God's Word lighting your path – repenting you daily – pointing you to Jesus – until, like the wheat of the fields, you are harvested and gathered eternally into His barn.

Dearly beloved, come, let us rejoice, for “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.