

121023 "**Prepare the Way for the Lord**" Mark 1:1-8

1. Today is the second Sunday of Advent. We learned last week that the Advent is a four-week period of waiting for Jesus to come as baby Jesus in Bethlehem and as the Lord of the Second Coming. Also, it's a time to polish ourselves and prepare with godliness even in the hustle and bustle of the year-end.

There was a so-called the "400 Silent Years" between Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, and Matthew, the beginning of the New Testament. It was a span where no new prophets were raised and God revealed nothing new to the Jewish people. The prophet God set up after the prophet Malachi was John the Baptist. The Israelites waited for a long time.

The Book of Malachi has four chapters. It ends like this in verses 5 and 6: "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."

In Matthew 11:14 we read, "This is Elijah who will come." Jesus testified that John the Baptist was the "Elijah that Malachi prophesied." Of course, John the Baptist was not Elijah reborn. This means that John the Baptist's life, message, and mission are similar to those of Elijah. Elijah, also isolated from the people, received spiritual training and appeared at a decisive moment to bring the hearts of the people back to God. Then, you learn that the meaning of preparing the way for the Lord is to start by turning yourself to God and then help others turn to God.

2. One day, the world-famous conductor Leonardo Bernstein was being broadcast on television. When it was time to talk freely, one of his fans asked.

“Which instrument is the most difficult to find in an orchestra to play?”

But he gave an unexpected answer. “It’s not that hard-to-find people like violin and flute players. There are quite a few wind and percussion players, too.” He hesitated for a moment and then continued. “But it’s the hardest thing to find second violinists. Everyone wants to be a first violinist, but there are very few who want to be second violinists to help the first violinist create great harmony.”

Most people want to be the first performer. This is because he or she is in the second most important position in the orchestra after the conductor – known as the concertmaster. However, the second performer is always hidden behind the first performer and is not very visible to the audience.

Even though the second performer has the similar level of playing skills as the first performer, not many people want the position because it is not very noticeable. Not everyone can be the number one performer. When you work in front of someone, there must be invisible hands behind the scenes quietly serving, collaborating, and even praying. God will give the reward not only to the first performer but also to the faithful second performer.

John the Baptist was recognized by Jesus as the greatest of those born of a woman. Above all else, his greatness lies in the fact that he knew who he was. John the Baptist considered Jesus the main character of his life and lived a supporting role. He knew very well that he was the voice of one crying out in the wilderness before the Lord. So how can we prepare the way of the Lord? Even if you are not first or the best at what you do, you can enjoy what you do and acknowledge the Lord as the best and rely on him!

3. About John the Baptist, it is written in Luke 1:14: “You too will rejoice and be glad, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord...” This verse is the part where the angel speaks to Zacharias, the

father of John the Baptist. Including myself, all parents want their children to do well. There will be no difference in that mind. However, there are clear differences in how they want their children to do well. You can wish your children to have more than others, to rise to a higher position, to win competitions (higher, farther, faster), and to become great in the world, which is not bad at all actually. However, what we can learn from today's message is that if there is something we are truly happy about and pray for, you and your children will become great before God.

Here, there is a word to pay attention to. Great, the Greek word [megas] meaning "abundant, important" and grace, the Greek word [kara] meaning "abundance" have the same root. According to the Gospels, a great person refers to a person who has experienced the grace of God. The angel said that John the Baptist would become great, and the meaning of his name in Hebrew is "God has been gracious".

I sincerely hope that you too will become "great in the sight of God." I hope and pray that your children will also become "great in the sight of God." What is the meaning of being a great person in the world but truly small before God? Preparing the way of the Lord means changing your wishes and efforts to become great in the world to become great before God.

4. Last but not least, John the Baptist baptized with water and emphasized that they should bear fruit worthy of repentance. Repentance begins with confession through the lips, but the fruit of repentance is living a changed life. When John the Baptist was asked what those who want to repent should do, he gave a specific answer in Luke 3:11-14, "In reply he said to them, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.' Even tax-collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, 'Teacher, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.' Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what

should we do?' He said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.'"

These words are so important! These aren't any new answers. It's extremely ordinary. It is a life that does not deceive and steal from others. It's all already written in the law, so it's not something new or great at all. He is not saying you should give up all your money. He is not saying you should go to a faraway place as a missionary. It's about living honestly, not harming others, and living a life of compassion and sharing yours with others.

Even today, people tell me that it is difficult to survive and compete while being good and honest. Because the world is rough and there are many dishonest people in it. The fruit worthy of repentance in this kind of life does not mean that you live a good and honest life in a harsh world and then end up ruined. Rather, to be honest before God and people, be more sincere, work harder, and be kinder! Then pray for God's help! See if God helps you or not. Even after doing that, if God doesn't help you, come and see me.

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, John the Baptist lived his life as one who prepared the way for the Lord. He did not just think about what the Lord would do, but also thought about what he could do and put it into practice. When you look faithfully to Jesus and live your daily life faithfully, real change begins within you and in your family and that will transform the world. In that life, you can experience God's Word guiding your life, and taste the wonder of its power and the comforting warmth it provides. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. To Christ be thanks and praise. Amen.