

120824 Sermon "Prepare the Way for Christ" Luke 3:1-6

As we journey through Advent, we encounter John the Baptist, a figure whose life causes us to ask, "What kind of person is truly great in the eyes of God?" The world often measures greatness by wealth, power, or fame, but John shows us a different standard. He points to the greatness of preparing the way for Christ.

John the Baptist's message is simple and clear: Repent, Be baptized, and Bear fruits. He called people to recognize their sin, turn away from it, and reorient their lives toward God. Repentance is not just about feeling regret or remorse for past actions but about committing to a renewed life in God's presence.

John's baptism was a public act of repentance and a symbol of spiritual cleansing. John emphasized that repentance must result in tangible evidence—actions that reflect a changed heart. This means living out repentance through justice, generosity, humility, and integrity in daily life. This is what John Wesley, who founded the Methodist movement, described as "social holiness."

He believed that the Christian faith should not only be practiced individually but also in community with others. This idea is encapsulated in his famous phrase, "there's no holiness but social holiness." In other words, we as a church are preparing the way for Christ through acts of love and justice together. These preparations are not, in fact, limited to Advent. These acts are the fruit of repentance, showing God's light to the world.

This year, our church has demonstrated social holiness through tangible acts of love and services: For example, 1. We donated 500 pounds of food, \$460 in gift cards, a basket of Christmas cards, and a CD of Christmas music, offering not just sustenance but the joy and hope of the season. 2. We hosted the annual Thanksgiving dinner for about 50 residents of Parish Court, which is a

senior low income housing apartment, sharing not only a meal but the warmth of community and fellowship. 3. We participated in the CROP Hunger Walk in Bridgeport, working to end world hunger. Our church stood out as the largest group and the most generous donors to the cause. These actions are part of preparing the way for Christ. They demonstrate what it means to bear fruit for repentance and to live out social holiness.

John the Baptist reminds us that greatness in God's eyes is not measured by status or accomplishments but by faithfulness and humility. It is found in the willingness to point others to Christ and to live lives that reflect His love.

John's call to repentance challenges us to examine our lives. Are we clearing the way for Christ, removing obstacles like pride, selfishness, or apathy? Are we filling the valleys of despair with hope and leveling the mountains of injustice with acts of mercy and kindness?

As our Chancel Choir prepares to present Lloyd Larson's Christmas Cantata "Behold, the Star", we are reminded that Christ's coming brings light to the darkness and hope to the world. The star symbolizes the guiding presence of Christ, leading us toward His kingdom. Just as the star led the wise men to the Savior, we are called to guide others toward Him through our words, deeds, and communal acts of love. Let this cantata inspire us to shine as lights in the world, reflecting the glory of Christ's coming.

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, in this second week of Advent, we light the candle of peace, a reminder that Christ, the Prince of Peace, is near us. As we prepare the way of the Lord, let us embrace John Wesley's vision of social holiness, by staying in God's love and living out our faith in Christ through actions that bless others. 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.