

Rev. Danny Mackey  
Fourth Sunday in Advent  
December 20, 2020  
John 1:19-28  
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Advent season is ending. Christmas is coming. But preparations are still to be made. John the Baptist is Christ's forerunner. He preaches what people needed to hear—and still need to hear. Let us, therefore, listen to John's preaching as we make our final preparations to celebrate the Lord's Nativity.

In our Gospel, the Jewish leaders send their underlings to investigate John. After all, John's become quite popular. So they want to know who he thinks he is. But John isn't polite or respectful. In fact, he could care less. These underlings of the Sanhedrin are more annoying than the gnats and lice living in John's camel-hair robes. So he gives them non-answers. "I'm not the Christ. I'm not Elijah. I'm not the Prophet." They don't give up. They keep pestering him. "Fine," he relents, "I'm the Voice. The Voice of one crying in the wilderness 'Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said.'"

John knows his job. He's to prepare people for the coming of Christ. That's why we focus on John each Advent. He prepares us to celebrate Christ and His Mass. And how is this done? John preached, and John baptized.

What one word embodies John's preaching and baptizing? "Repent." It's "Repent." "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." John continually proclaimed "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." John and his preaching is all about repentance.

Repentance has become more popular this last year—although that's not saying much. It used to be that repentance—at least, our society's version of it—was about just changing what you're doing a bit. Kind of like a moral tune up. Think New Years' resolutions. But repentance has become something more drastic in 2020. Anti-racism, BLM, the ever-increasing use of shame, virtue signaling, and social justice... all these things are demands for repentance. There's even religious language involved. People who don't espouse particular views online are dubbed heretics.

Society equates repentance with forcing proper behavior in others. Admittedly, repentance does result in changed behavior. John told tax-collectors not to overtax. He told soldiers not to extort. He told those who had two cloaks to give to the person who doesn't

even have one. But repentance isn't about outward compliance. Rather, repentance is about the heart. And because the heart is set aright, then the outward actions of the heart are necessarily more godly and more pious.

The heart. That's what John and the Church are fighting for. That's what needs to be prepared to make room for the Christ. The heart. From the heart flow our actions and thoughts and our feelings. The heart is where faith resides. John was fighting for the heart of the nation of Israel. The Church fights for the hearts of the people of all nations.

So, consider your heart. But don't just consider it as some form of self-analysis, some self-diagnosis. And don't let other fallen creatures dictate how and what you ought to feel and think. Society and its vagaries have nothing to offer humanity in regard to repentance. They make accusations and demands, but they offer no cure. Compliance to what other's demand isn't a cure. It's just you submitting your heart to the will of others. They will crush you, whether they be the civil and religious leaders of Jerusalem or the domestic terrorists and corrupt politicians of today. They will crush you, because they care nothing for you.

John knows that. So he directs people back to the Word of God. God's Word alone can set aright the conscience and govern our thoughts and emotions. God's Word alone is unchanging and won't disappoint. And the God who gives us His Word always cares. He's made you and all creatures. He preserves you and all your members. It is by God's will that all things exist and continue to exist. No one else has done that for you. No one else can.

Because you know God loves you—He not only created you but also redeemed you—then His command for you to repent ought not be dismissed. Two seasons of the Church Year are dedicated to repentance—Lent *and* Advent. The entire life of the Christian is to be a life of repentance. John preached “Repent.” Likewise, the One greater than John commands, “Repent.”

Repent of your sin. Consider your life and situation according to the Ten Commandments. What have done that goes against them? What have you failed to do? Where has your heart been? Have you given it to the world and society's demands? Have you given in to your own selfishness and self-centeredness? Is your heart directed to God? His heart is directed toward you.

The leaders in Jerusalem didn't like John calling for repentance. It implied they weren't doing their job. And that they were doing something wrong. Both were true. Their hearts

were far from God, deep in corruption. That's why they question and challenge him, attempting to silence him. But John has none of it. "I baptize with water, but among you stands One you don't know—He who comes after me, and I am entirely unworthy to even untie His sandal." John won't be distracted. He has a job to do. People need to be made ready—they need to be made ready by repentance.

If you want to be ready to celebrate Christ and His Mass, repent. If you don't repent—if you don't recognize your sin as shown to you by the Ten Commandments and turn away from them—you'll never be ready for Christmas. Not really. You might be ready to unwrap presents, but not for Christmas. Without repentance, you'll never understand the Christ Child who comes to redeem you from your sin.

That's why our society's celebrations of Christmas are torn down so quickly. That's why all the good cheer and joy we see and hear will be gone by January, if not December 26<sup>th</sup>. The world doesn't get repentance, and so it's never truly prepared for Christ and His Mass. Without repentance, you can't realize that you need—really need—Christmas. Without repentance you don't realize that you need a Savior—and so the coming of the Savior just passes by.

John the Baptist's preaching is something we still need to hear. Repent. Prepare your hearts for the Christ Child. Have your hearts governed and ruled—not by society and this world, but by the very Word of God, which never changes. Repent, because we are all sinners in need of a Savior.

And then, when you look at Christmas, you can behold it all through eyes and hearts made aright through repentance. And you will behold the height and depth of God the Father's love for you in sending His only-begotten Son. Laid in a manger. Wrapped in swaddling cloths. His mother and guardian, angels and shepherds gathered around His crib. All for you. And you will know the extent of God's love for you. A love that sets your hearts aright. A love that saves. And in the face of that infant you behold the grace and favor of God toward you. That infant proves what lengths God has gone to redeem you!

In Jesus' name.

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