

“Illuminating Peace”
December 10, 2023

Pastor Amy Besola

As we gather on this Second Sunday of Advent, we continue our journey of anticipation and preparation for the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Today's Old Testament scripture from Jeremiah illuminates hope amid despair. It is a reminder that, no matter how desolate our lives may seem, God's call to repentance is a beacon of hope. He longs to transform our barrenness into abundance, our disobedience into righteousness. Let us heed His call, break up the fallow ground of our hearts, and sow seeds of righteousness, trusting in the promise that our loving God will bring forth a harvest of hope and restoration in our lives.

Our focus today turns to the theme of hope - a hope that transcends the challenges and uncertainties of our world. Amid the chaos, we find solace and inspiration in the promise of God's unfailing love and the advent of the Light of the World.

The passage concludes with a poignant cry from Jeremiah, expressing the deep sorrow and anguish in his heart as he contemplates the devastation that sin has brought upon God's people. Yet, even in this cry of desolation, there is an undercurrent of hope, as Jeremiah's lament is a plea for hearts to turn back to the Lord. The passage begins with a call to return to the Lord. "If you return, O Israel, declares the Lord, to me you should return." God, in His infinite mercy, invites His people to turn away from their sinful ways and come back to Him. This call to repentance is not only a declaration of God's desire for reconciliation but also an expression of His boundless grace.

The New Testament Passage from Mark 1:1-8 is the recollection from Isaiah, with the promise of the long-awaited Messiah. Our heavenly father is a long suffering, loving parent, waiting with open arms for their wayward child to come home. He extends the same invitation to us, His children. From Isaiah 40:3-5 (NIV), "A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'"

The prophet Isaiah speaks of preparing the way for the Lord, making a highway in the desert. This metaphor calls us to examine the state of our own hearts. Are there valleys of doubt or mountains of pride that hinder our connection with God? Advent is a time to level the rough ground within us, to make room for the glory of the Lord to be revealed.

We see the promise of restoration, God promises a beautiful transformation to those who respond to His call. He assures them that if they break up their fallow ground, removing the hardness of their hearts, and sow righteousness, they will reap the abundant fruits of His mercy and love.

Mark 1:1-11 lays a solid foundation for understanding the identity and mission of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist plays a crucial role in preparing the way for Jesus. You will recall that when John was in his mother, Elizabeth's womb, scripture describes him leaping upon hearing Mary's voice.

John's message calls people to repentance, symbolized through baptism. John's baptism is not just a ritual; it is a powerful symbol of a transformed life. It signifies a turning away from sin and a readiness to receive the forgiveness offered by the coming Messiah. John's humility is evident as he acknowledges that he is not worthy even to untie the sandals of the One who is to come. His ministry serves as a reminder to us that humility and repentance are foundational aspects of preparing our hearts for the Lord.

This passage from Mark 1 invites us to embrace the good news of salvation and challenges us to follow the example of John the Baptist by repenting and humbling ourselves before the Lord. Just as Jesus submitted to baptism, let us surrender our lives to God's plan and purpose. May we, like John, prepare the way for the Lord in our hearts and lives, making room for the transformative work of the Holy Spirit. As we reflect on the baptism of Jesus, may we find assurance in our identity as beloved children of God and strive to live in a way that pleases Him.

This holiday season is an opportunity. A time when we can witness to a hurting world the Hope of Redemption. All around, we see a world hurting. From the images on the tv news of mass shootings and war, our world today is filled with valleys of despair and mountains of injustice.

The message of Advent reminds us that God is coming to set things right. Every valley of hopelessness will be raised up, and every mountain of oppression will be brought low. The hope we find in Christ is not wishful thinking; it is a confident expectation that God is at work, redeeming and restoring all things. As followers of Christ, we are called to be agents of change in the world. Advent challenges us to actively participate in preparing the way for the Lord in our communities. This means standing against injustice, extending compassion to the marginalized, and sharing the message of hope with those who desperately need it. Today, we lit the second candle of Advent, symbolizing the theme of hope. On this Sunday and the days ahead, may we illuminate peace. Let us commit ourselves to preparing the way for the Lord. May our hearts be open and ready to receive the glory of the Lord, and may our lives reflect the hope we have in Christ. As we anticipate the celebration of Christ's birth, let us also look forward to the day when the glory of the Lord will be revealed to all people.

May the peace, hope, joy, and love of this Advent season be with you all. Amen.