**Mark 1:1-8**

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. **2**  As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, **3**  the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’ ” **4**  John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **5** And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. **6** Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. **7** And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. **8**  I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

**“Wrapped Up In Repentance”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. In the classic 1940’s film, “It’s a Wonderful Life.” There is that moment when a bell rings in a Christmas tree and the little girl says, “Look, Daddy. Teacher says, every time a bell rings an angel gets his wings.” Even if angels earning wings is not so Scripturally sound, which it is not, bells ringing do catch our attention don’t they. Long before radio, TV, smart phones, and instant updates people relied on bells. The church also took advantage of this to ring out when services began, when there were weddings or funerals, and even at the seminary I heard bells ring whenever the Lord’s Prayer was being played at chapel.

By now most have jumped into the full swing of Christmas, which means making plans, wrapping presents, and plenty of other activities. In all the busyness, the second Sunday in Advent causes us to pause. We have that reminder some preparation is in order before Christmas. Rather than hearing a bell, John the Baptizer brings a loud announcement crying out in the wilderness. Isaiah the prophet promised God would send His ultimate messenger who would, “Prepare the way of the Lord.” His message was to prepare hearts for the coming of Christ. Specifically, this meant his message was all about preaching baptism. Preparing the way of the Lord is by repentance for Jesus comes to comfort, restore, and save.

1. **The way of repentance is a loving gift from God that turns all to baptism.**
2. More than a foul ball, John let the Law show failure in full.

* This preacher held no punches calling all lost, condemned, needy, miserable, loveless, empty, and finally enemies of God.
* Room must be made in hard hearts to hear as the psalmist said, “They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one” (Psalms 14:3).
* Luther tells us rejecting John happens in two ways, “The hindrance, which does not give way for the Lord is not only the coarse, bodily sins of unchastity, wrath, haughtiness, desire, etc., but rather also spiritual opinion and pharisaical pride, which thinks highly of its own good life and works, feels secure, does not itself condemn them, and in addition refuses to let them be condemned.”[[1]](#footnote-1)
* The water of baptism was a drowning of sinners just like with the Flood, a death of self that we return to confess before God even as the baptized.

1. Going out to John was to realize the true state of affairs for what they were.

* Being in the wilderness of the Jordan River was a reminder of what the Lord did for His people in the wilderness long ago.
* This place of baptizing stood in contrast to the security of Jerusalem or the comforts of home that people had.
* With all the advancements and glories today, we quickly forget that this creation is fallen and will never be paradise.
* Baptism is that source of water from God in the wilderness of a sinful world that has much danger and death.

1. Despair was not the point of John, but making preparation.

* Where some desired to make him the star he only could say, “After me comes he who is mightier than I.”
* John only aligned things rightly so that people were prepared to see the greater glory of Jesus coming to be the Lamb of God.
* Of course, none at first saw the worthiness of Christ’s crucifixion, but His death completed baptism and His power assured the Holy Spirit.
* The baptized repent because it is a gift of God to do so not our efforts, because how could we ever take comfort in our preparations?

1. **The way of repentance always comes with the love of Christ for the baptized.**
2. Comfort is what God plans to extend to sinners through Christ.

* Since none can stand in their righteousness by the law Isaiah promised, “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.”
* Jesus came to have a flood of condemnation fall upon Him, which means baptism is a real death but no one is ever alone as a sinner in this water.
* St. Paul declares, “you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor 6:11).
* Repenting of sin prepares the baptized to hear Christ and His greater word of forgiveness is our comfort.

1. Restoration is what God brings into a fallen creation set upon Christ.

* As Israel was preserved in the wilderness, so Christ took the baptized by John from the wilderness to the tree of life created by His cross.
* In contrast to the world, the Church belongs to Christ. He has cleansed her with the security and comfort of His sacrifice.
* What Word and Sacrament bring is paradise prepared by Jesus with life and salvation that flows out in love to our homes and for the world.
* Good is to be upheld even while the baptized, “are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

1. Deliverance is what God has prepared for any in Christ.

* As Jesus was mightier than John, so the Law and works will drive any to despair while Jesus, “will tend his flock like a shepherd.”
* Be ready for foolishness of the Gospel, “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”(Gal 3:26-27)
* It means we are worthy to take up the cross daily, worthy to have the Spirit of God at work in our weakness, worthy to confess, “I am baptized.”
* As God wraps us up by the call of repentance, so His Word gives saving faith in Jesus for He does not wither or fade, but comes again in glory.

I know you hear those bells ring that call for cash in red metal buckets this time of the year. Yet, strangely enough the Salvation Army as a church body sees baptism as not essential, which is most uncharitable.[[2]](#footnote-2) The bell rung by John the Baptizer is to preach baptism and prepare the way of Christ. All preaching comes in two parts. The first says, “You fail in the way of the Lord!” The second says, “Believe in Christ for the way is to receive Him.” Preparing the way of the Lord is by repentance for Jesus comes to comfort, restore, and save. Amen. The peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. https://blogs.lcms.org/2017/preaching-john-baptizer [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.waterbeachsalvationarmy.org.uk/what-to-know-more/why-does-the-salvation-army-not-baptise-or-hold-communion/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)