

***Prepare the way of the Lord*** (Luke 3:1-6)

\* Dear Friends, with reference to the history of St. Luke's, when the Rev. John Warther was in the beginning of his shepherding, God started to write the chronicle for another Evangelical Lutheran church in my former hometown for which I became a pastor. That time I focused on preaching repentance, forgiveness of sins and judgment. I firmly insisted on a point that the real repentance must continue through all Christian life and it signifies the remission of sins by the power of grace in Christ Jesus given to his church.

\* Friends, if you noticed the gospel message for this Sunday it also has historical connection but on this point it relates not to the first year of the shepherding of the Rev. John Warther in St. Luke's but to the fifteenth year of the reign of the emperor Tiberius in Rome. In this sense John's prophetic work was attached by the evangelist to a specific time on the landscape of history, probably 26 or 27 AD, in order the foremost occurrence would not be classified as a myth by skeptics. In the beginning of the New Era, John the Baptist left the desert and started preaching the baptism of repentance throughout the countryside along the banks of the Jordan. His message was spoken with the power of the Holy Spirit, and it produced a tremendous effect especially among Jews who had the right sense of messianic expectation. As a result *many people from Jerusalem, Judea and all the region around the Jordan, went out to him, And they were baptized in the Jordan by John, confessing their sins*, (Mt 3:56).

\* Upon hearing John we realized that his message continues to be fresh and meaningful even among the mature who have the right sense of messianic expectation. In addition to that, we've understood that the time we are living is a favorable time - the day of salvation until the great and awesome day of the LORD. With these two significances in mind, let's set aside this week specifically for penitent prayers and for meditation over John the Baptist's message. We can start with prayer and then meditation right now. O Jesus, plenteous in mercy, at your first Advent you came to seek and to save that which is lost yet at your second coming you will appear, not to carry any burden of sin nor to deal with sin, but to bring to full salvation those who are waiting for and expecting you. We thank you that, through your protection and by your grace, we have been permitted once more to reach the holy season. Grant us your wisdom and Spirit in order to spend this time in

your fear, in meditation, repentance and preparation. Lead us by way of faith to the glory of the beloved sons and daughters of the Father, in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

\* Friends, do you think Western civilization would trust and follow a spokesman with desert habits, dressed poorly, obscure and rude, maybe stink as a goat, not shaving and so forth? Certainly the Westerners would neither give a chance to such a person to speak nor let him come closer. Contrary to that, the Westerners allow a fashion person, or someone like the British spy James Bond, or an American pastor like Joel Osteen to be their leader. Do you see the problem? Significantly, a poorly wrapped truth is not accepted as the truth even if it is 100% truth! But this problem is not ours only, for example, in the fifteenth year of the reign the emperor Tiberius in Rome when Pontius Pilate was a governor in Jerusalem, John the Baptist went into all the region around the Jordan river, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, (Luk 3:3). However, the Jewish elite didn't give its ear to him. Guess why?, (Lk 7:25,). According to Matthew *John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey,* (Mat 3:4). He spoke loudly and he didn't compromise truth in order to be pleased by sinners, (Mat 3:7). Certainly the upper class from Jerusalem would be charmed and give their ears to John Baptist if he came into public view as a prince, polite and skilful in speech. But John was not comparable with that prince. That is why they didn't come to listen to him and they were not baptized by him, (Luk 7:29-30) and they were not ready for Christ. I set up a brand name for them, *Outsiders*. Friends, if you feel yourselves a little bit like *outsiders* you may want to join with me in a penitent prayer, for now is the favorable time of preparation for the Lord. Dear Jesus Christ, I am a miserable sinner and confess to you that from time to time I gave my ear and preferences to the liars, meanwhile I didn't listen to people through whom you spoke truth because of my prejudgment regarding their personalities. Please help me to get rid of this sin forever, let your name will be glorified forever. Amen.

\* Moving forward to the next significance, we are ready to hear John's message again. Here is a voice of John calling in the wilderness; listen to it, *Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God,* (Lk 3:4-6).

Friends, the first person whom the Scripture refers to in this message was the prophet Isaiah, (Isa 40:3). He told us the real good news. After him the good news was resounded by Malachi, (Mal 3:1). After him John the Baptist preached, (Lk 2:11); after him all Evangelists and the Apostles; finally, in the very end of the Bible, St John left the same good news saying by mouth who is going to come, "Surely I am coming soon," says the Lord, (Rev 22:20). Jesus will come to accomplish our salvation, and he will free us from all kinds of painful and disgusting things forever including our inclinations for prejudging. This news of a great joy is really good **if** we are ready to meet our Lord. Therefore, according to Isaiah, John the Baptist, the Evangelists and Apostles the real good news affiliates with provision. Christians who say we believe in Jesus Christ but do nothing in order to be ready for his coming deceive themselves; they are like the *five foolish virgins* from the parable, for such believers the real good news of great joy suddenly will turn into the most bad news ever being heard. After all they will be found among the Outsiders.

\* Fast forward to the time of Christ, before a king would take a trip, the liegemen cleansed roadbeds and, if a track was not leveled, they repaired it according to a fashion standard. Similarly, John spoke to the listeners who were familiar with the road's standard for a King. For them to follow John's teaching meant to work out their lives in such a way that their lives become identical to the norms of righteousness. Significantly, John didn't teach people as the law teaches: *you shall not*, rather he taught *you shall*. Those in attendance asked John, "What then shall we do?" (Luk 3:10). Be merciful, be contented, be honest, be thankful, be compassionate, be devoted, and be modest, he said, (Lk 3:10-14) These virtues make the disciples ready for the King of Righteousness. Who revealed mercy and compassion for Christ's sake certainly will be more acceptable in the Last Day than the Pharisees' righteousness, (Jas 2:13) based upon the Law.

\* Finally, let's mention one more significance. Friends, the time of preparation for Christ is not limited by the season of Advent; we should always be ready. And, are we ready? Certainly we should be. But let's think about ourselves modestly. To be prepared according to John's message, it also means the confession of sins and baptizing. The last was a visible sign signifying the forgiveness of sins, (Mat 3:6). For our Lord is full of mercy and compassion; here, in the church, we have the wonderful experience of Jordan's baptizing – confessing sins, receiving forgiveness and spending time in preparation. At the end is the last significance we have to know

in connection with preparation we have to know. According to the last verse of our Sunday text it says, *and all flesh shall see the salvation of God*, (Luk 3:6), some from inside and some from outside, (Mat 25:11-12).

Beloved of the Lord, from all my heart I wish you to be insiders of God's salvation. Keep your eyes upon the Lord, trust him, love him and be faithful to him. Amen.

Beloved, the grace and mercy of the Lord Jesus be with you always.

Amen