

Isaiah 40:3-5:

*“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.”*

This week has the theme of Preparation, Prophecy and Faith. The Scripture verse does sound more like what I think of as a second coming rather than the birth of an infant. Isaiah writes of both though as revealed to him by God. You may wonder what building Noah’s Ark has to do with Preparation for Advent, but we don’t only have to be prepared at Advent. Sometimes I think I am challenged to always be ready. Sometimes I really don’t want to be ready to meet the

challenges given to me each day as I seek to live my life for Christ. I want to do it “my way.”

I think Noah had a very strong faith. God picked him out because he was the only one that seemed to be following the will of God. According to Genesis 6 God even said he was sorry he had created man so he decided to destroy all except Noah and his family. He instructed Noah to build an ark and even told him how to build it. He told Noah it was going to rain and cover the earth. Stop for a minute and think how people must have laughed at Noah. They were living very immoral lives and why would they listen to someone who said God told him to build an ark because it was going to rain enough to cover the earth!

How often are we challenged to do something to follow God’s will, but we don’t want to listen. How often are we told in a quiet way that something is not a good idea, but we do it anyway. Often we have Jiminy Cricket on our shoulder, but we ignore him just as Pinocchio did. We can say that youth are the only ones guilty of this, but so are we as adults. We often are unprepared for challenges that we face every day.



The other theme associated with this week of Advent is Faith. Poor Isaiah had to have faith in what he was prophesying,. Noah had to have faith to build the ark, and we have to have faith each day to be ready for the challenges that face us. What does all of

this have to do with being prepared for Advent? Unfortunately, the way we usually prepare for Advent, which we associated with Christmas, is going shopping and often spending more than we should. We party and have a good time, but are we really getting prepared for the Lord to come as a baby or as a returning Messiah? There is certainly nothing wrong with Christmas parties or Christmas presents and wonderful times with families. That is great and at the same time we need to be ready for the true meaning of Christmas and Advent. It is not easy to balance these two things, but we can do it and we do most of the time.

What did the people who started the tradition of Advent really mean? What did they mean by preparation” I’m sure it is quite different than what I have mentioned! Study tells us that in the early days of Advent, Christians would spend 40 days in penance, prayer, and fasting to prepare for Advent. There was little connection between Advent and Christmas.

By the 6th century it had come to be associated with the coming of Christ, but not as a baby in a manger, but as an image appearing in the clouds for the second coming and as a judgment of the world.

By the middle ages, it was thought of as preparation for the coming of Christ. Some churches still think of the first two weeks as being related to the second coming of Christ and the last two weeks as preparation for the coming of Christ as a baby. The emphasis is more and more on faith for this time. It is so easy to tie Faith and Preparation together.

In Hebrews we are told about a man named Enoch who skipped death! We read about Noah and the ark:

*“By faith, Noah built a ship in the middle of dry land. He was warned about something he couldn’t see, and acted on what he was told. The result? His family was saved. His act of faith drew a sharp line between the evil of the unbelieving world and the rightness of the believing world. As a result, Noah became intimate with God.”* Hebrews 11:7-

Faith and preparation are mentioned many times together. Abel took a better sacrifice to God than Cain, but it wasn’t the gift it was the preparation. Abraham said yes to God and prepared to travel to many unknown places not knowing where he was going. Sarah believed and had a child at an old age.

In Hebrews 11:6 we read: *“It’s impossible to please God apart from faith. And why? Because anyone who wants to approach God must believe both that he exists and that he cares enough to respond to those who seek him.”*

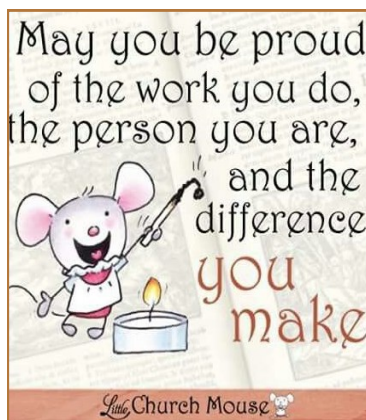
The Scripture for this week is confusing. We are to *“make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.”* What does that mean? Perhaps we have deserts—places in need of love, or Scripture, or friendliness in our hearts. Perhaps we have some places that need to be straightened out. Things we need to do.

In Colossians, Paul writes *“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord*

*and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ”* It is all very confusing. Then we are not to work too hard, We are to take a whole day to rest because working too hard we will get weary! I think we are to prepare for retirement, but does that mean that we can retire from preparing for life? Any work, making peanut butter sandwiches for a child’s lunch, cleaning floors, searching on the computer, teaching a trade, doing bookwork—all jobs can be done for the glory of God. As is true with many Bible verses, we can take them out of context and make them suit our ideas or desires at that time.

In one of the modern Advent Candle traditions, this candle is also called “The Bethlehem Candle.” Micah told the people *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrata, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel.”* Micah 5:2

People must have been very confused. They are being told about changing their ways and about a ruler over Israel that will be from the tiny clan of Bethlehem.



Bethlehem was very small, probably would have one stop light today if that! The clan was small, but very important. We are important today. Each of us can

make a positive contribution to this world. We have knowledge for this world and we have a book of wisdom for the next world. This is one time when we can’t say “I’ll let Joe do it.” We are the only ones that can prepare ourselves. Each individual has to have faith. No one else can do that for us.

Prayer: Lord God, You made me in your image and you have given me so many talents. Help me to realize that although I may not be important in public life, I am very important in your world, and that you are with me every day as I prepare to do a good job at whatever task I have been given, knowing that ultimately I will be prepared to spend eternity with you. Amen.

1. Do we need to be prepared every day?
2. John The Baptist was given the opportunity or job to prepare the people for Christ’s preaching and revealing himself as our Savior. How did he do it? Would you want that job today?
3. Matthew 17:20: *“Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”* What did Christ mean?

