

## Hope for the world – Jesus comes to clean house

*"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; 6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' "*

Whenever I hear this word of God, I recall an experience from my freshman year in college.

- My roommate Linda was a neatnik
- – no wrinkles in her bedspread, everything in its place.
- And I? well, I was just not so neat.
- We were the odd couple – and you could practically draw a line down the middle of the room to tell whose side was whose.

Which brings me to the experience I think of when I hear about the Lord straightening the crooked and filling in the valleys.

I had had a full day of classes and went back to the dorm to study.

- As soon as I opened the door, I stopped in my tracks.
- Something was wrong.
- Was I at the wrong room? No.
- But things were not as they had been when I left that morning.

All the piles on my desk had been carefully straightened.

- My perfumes and makeup were lined up like toy soldiers in straight rows on my dresser.
- My bedspread had no wrinkles.
- My shoes were paired together and lined up at the edge of the bed.

- Everything had a place.
- Everything was in order.

I'd like to say it stayed that way, but as most of you know, I am not a neatnik. And to my roommate's chagrin, the room did not stay the way she had put it for very long.

But Jesus is coming. And when he comes, everything will be different.

Everything will be put in its place.

Justice will be perfectly rendered.

The low will be raised up and the high and mighty be made low.

God's people will be scrubbed clean and impurities removed as though by fire.

And the question is – will God use Dove soap or Fels Naptha?

Seriously – this preparation for the Lord's coming, this purification of our lives,

This dreadful housecleaning

is accomplished the same way the Lord God Almighty has done everything else:

**through his Word.**

A messenger tells us of the Lord's coming.

*See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.*

Luke tells us the word of the Lord came to John in the wilderness.

I wonder how that happened?

Was it God's voice, like it came to Moses in the burning bush or to Elijah under the broom tree?

Or was it Jesus himself, the living Word of God, who went out to John in the wilderness and told him the time had come for his public ministry to start and what his role would be?

The Bible doesn't tell us exactly.

But it is clearly true that the word of the Lord spoken through the prophet Isaiah and repeated by Malachi is about to be fulfilled, and we hear about it first from John the Baptist.

*"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; 6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' "*

I think John got the message wrong – this sounds like marching orders for PennDot, the DEP, the National Park Service, and maybe even the CIA.

**But John comes out proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins instead of handing out shovels for pothole filling.**

What sense are we to make of this?

Well, if the coming of the Lord depends upon filled potholes and level ground, I don't think Pennsylvania will make the cut.

If the coming of the Lord depends upon my house being clean and everything in its place, I won't make the cut.

But I think God is pointing us in a different direction in Luke 3.

**John is proclaiming a baptism of repentance for forgiveness.**

That is, a cleansing for a **clean slate and a new direction.**

When we heed the call of God through John the Baptist, we are **immersed in a relationship with Jesus** in which our house is cleaned

Our spiritual house.

**Baptism is the beginning of a new relationship with God.**

Jesus designated baptism as entry into the relationship in which

- God's Word scrubs the mind of filth,
- purifies the heart of malice and resentment,
- and directs the will toward action that reflects God's kingdom work of care for the poor and vulnerable

Repentance is not just a desire to be better

**– it is a complete reorientation from a world with our selves at the center to life with Christ at the center.**

Baptism is the beginning of the risk of faith that lets go of our self – that needy greedy creature that consumes us – to cling to Jesus.

- To go where he goes
- To hear what he says
- To do what he does
- And to live as he lives.

**Many people who have been baptized do not believe in Jesus.**

They think they have a free pass to heaven without giving up their self-centered lives.

Those who are proud and haughty are like the mountains that will be toppled over.

Those who think their sins are secret and hidden from view will find themselves like the valleys lifted up and exposed for all to see.

The coming of the Lord Jesus is judgment against wickedness and justice for the poor, oppressed, and downtrodden.

That is a fact.

It is also fact that Jesus comes to redeem what is bound in sin.

**John reminds us that with baptism comes forgiveness**

– and forgiveness demands new choices, new behavior that does God's will on earth as in heaven.

Just read the rest of Luke chapter 3 to see what I mean.

**If forgiveness does not change us, we have not believed Jesus.**

Jesus comes to clean spiritual house.

Let us pray for the Holy Spirit to help us receive that cleaning as the gracious, tender love of our Savior.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen

<https://bustedhalo.com/video/watch-advent-two-minutes>