

Second Sunday in Advent – 2021

Malachi 3:1-7b

Philippians 1:2-11

Luke 3:1-20

See if these lines ring a bell. Ring my friend, I said you'd call, Doctor Robert. Day or night he'll be there any time at all, Doctor Robert. You're a new and better man; He helps you to understand; He does everything he can, Doctor Robert. If you're down he'll pick you up, Doctor Robert. Take a drink from his special cup, Doctor Robert. He's a man you must believe; Helping anyone in need; No one can succeed like Doctor Robert. Well, well, well, you're feeling fine; Well, well, well, he'll make you, Doctor Robert.

It's a song, of course. If you can guess the title then you must be a genius. If you knew straight away who wrote the song then you must've grown up in the '60's. It's a Beatles tune. It's about a New York physician whose unorthodox prescriptions made him a favorite of the glitterati in Manhattan. This "physician" was known as Dr. Feelgood. He was expelled from the New York State Medical Society in 1975 for malpractice. He wrote a book titled "What's So Bad About Feeling Good?" It was published in 1983. Dr. Feelgood died in 1987. This physician, with his nouveau drug therapy, couldn't heal himself. The song certainly fit with the 1960's. Drugs were seen as the path to enlightenment, self-actualization, wholeness. It was a demonic trap. John Lennon sings: "You're a new and better man. Well, well, well, he'll make you... Dr. Robert."

John the Baptist was preaching; man, was he preaching! The last and greatest prophet, John the Baptist (Luke 7:28), was the personal bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. His voice lifted the hearts of men and women. His voice cut through the noise of the day and found its mark. His voice carried a message of urgency and a commensurate call for action. Prepare! The Christ, God's chosen vessel for salvation, He is near. Your life will be determined by how you prepare for His arrival. Living for self? Living for some pleasure payoff? Living to make others dance to your tune? That is the way of death. Choose this day whom you will serve. Will you serve self and sin and death or will you serve the Living Lord? John was preaching! The Lord is nigh. He knows who is true and who is false. "His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Luke 3:17).

John's audience knew that his words were true. You know that you were created by the Almighty. You know that you are accountable to Him. His law is written on your heart (Romans 2:15). You know that you have failed. John's audience knew then, about themselves, what you know now, about yourself. The Baptist was calling people to repentance. It is a complete reversal of life – turning away from darkness, wherever it is in one's life, and turning toward the Light. Repentance is not some tepid spiritual display that balms a self-serving conscience. Repentance is a comprehensive spiritual change. Sorrow for sin and an active preparation (an active readiness) **to present oneself before God**. John made sure that the people knew that this "preparation" wasn't to be a spiritual "dress-up game." How clear are these words? "Bear fruits in keeping with repentance" (Luke 3:8). The people listening knew. Those words are super clear and super direct and super applicable.

To John's voice, the people responded. Crowds of people, from every walk of life, they begged him to answer a simple question: "What should we do?" It was a sincere search for direction: "What should we do?" Tax collectors and soldiers, folks from varied vocations, a whole spectrum of people: "What should we do?" To demonstrate that their faith, their conversion, their repentance wasn't just a religious charade, they wanted direction. Are we even asking that question? Now is the time to prepare. The Lord is coming. John directed people to their station in life. Are you a soldier? Then be a good one. Don't extort money, don't threaten people with false accusations, be content with your wages. Are you a wife, a husband? Be a good one; look out for the interests of your spouse. Serve your beloved, be honorable in your relations with the opposite sex so there is no unease in your spouse's mind.

In the early church, in the first few centuries, those who were to be baptized were examined before their final catechesis and they would be questioned by the bishop. The bishop wouldn't probe about doctrinal matters. He would inquire whether or not they visited the sick or took care of widows. Dr. Robert – the song states that he'll make you a new and better man. Well, well, well he'll make you, Dr. Robert. Take a drink from his special cup, Dr. Robert. Contemporary man prefers Dr. Robert and has little use for John the Baptist. Scoffers; "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:4). But know this: "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed" (2 Peter 3:9-10).

John the Baptist prepared his contemporaries for a divine reality that shook the world. God Himself was on the scene. The Mightier One, whose sandals John was not worthy to stoop down and untie, He was in their midst. Men and women needed to receive Him aright. So many did precisely that. With joy, so many saw the deliverance which God provided for sinners in Jesus. Not just then, but throughout the ages. Listen to John's father, the priest Zechariah, at John's birth: "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God" (Luke 2:76-78a). John still prepares Christ's way. You are John's contemporary congregation. His voice echoes in this holy house. His message is lively and vibrant and relevant... now.

We prepare for the King. What a wondrous King our Lord is! No palace for the King of kings; "His royal power disguised He bore; a servant's form, like mine, He wore." "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matthew 8:28). Christ the King laid His head on a cross outside of Jerusalem. God the Father prepared that place for His only-begotten Son. With such love for you, that cross was prepared. On that cross, the Lord of glory gave Himself up for you. Jesus was prepared to take my place. He was prepared to suffer the Father's fury over your sin. What Jesus had, He gave up. He was prepared to die. That death is the only thing that prepares you for life.

No place was found for Him at the inn in birth, but in death a place was found for Him, a place prepared for Him – a garden tomb. Adam's tomb, Eve's tomb, yours and mine – prepared for

our King and a three-day rest. Well, well, well He'll make you. The risen Christ comes striding out of that tomb on Easter, a Sunday, and by virtue of His death and resurrection you are a new and better man. Take a drink from His special cup, His chalice and know that forgiveness is on your tongue. Take a drink from His special cup, His chalice and know that He delights to make His home in your soul. Christ's Kingdom is in this place. This Divine Service prepares us for life with Him. This Divine Service is life with Him. The Holy Spirit is preparing us for Christ's return. "Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve you with pure minds, humble hearts and eager hands."