

"Pointing Others to God's Kingdom"

Scripture Passages: 1) **Romans 13:11-14**
2) **Isaiah 2:1-5**
3) **Matthew 3:1-6**

Introduction to the Skit: The season of Advent is a time for reflection. Reflection on what you may ask? Advent is a time to reflect on the living of our lives.

We have been talking about living a life of response, response to God's grace. Unfortunately, we often live blind to either God's grace, or our feeble response, or sometimes we live blind to both. Advent is a season set aside to ponder and reflect on our very relationship with God, our identity as God's children, and God's call upon our lives. Paul encouraged the church in Rome to wake from their sleep. Advent is a time to wake from our sleep.

In Victor Hugo's Les Miserables he tells the story of a man, Jean Val Jean, who has lost his way, who has lost his identity as a child of God, who has lost his sense of call. The events and the choices made and the hurts of the world have lulled Jean Val Jean to sleep. He needs to awaken to the beauty and power of God's grace. Listen as Jean Val Jean is bolted from his sleep by the awesome power of God's saving grace.

The Skit:

Matthew 3:1-6 Listen now to the familiar words of John the Baptist as we hear them in Matthew's Gospel. **Read Matthew 3:1-6**

Prepare the Way: John the Baptist's call was to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. His job was to point people to the Kingdom of God as it broke into their lives. Advent is a season for us to prepare the way for Christ's coming into our own lives. I think it also a time for us to point out to others the in-breaking of God's Kingdom. So Advent places us on a parallel call with that of John the Baptist.

A number of years ago I had the gift of participating in the Thompson Scholar Program at Columbia Theological Seminary. For two weeks I immersed myself in the library of the seminary, reading constantly. We also had access to the faculty to pick their brains. Our purpose was to write and then present a paper at the end of our two week stay. The only requirement was that the topic for study needed to relate in some way to evangelism.

The topic that I chose was conversion; a topic that continues to engage my heart. The Reformed Tradition believes that the Holy Spirit is the author of conversion. So my question was and is, if the Holy Spirit is the author of conversion then what is our role in the process of conversion? Do we play a role?

Jean Val Jean: John the Baptist would say that we definitely play a role. We prepare the way. We point out the reality of God's Kingdom to people. We make the way to God straight for others.

It seems to me that is exactly what the Bishop did for Jean Val Jean. The Bishop prepared the way for Jean Val Jean to understand more fully and receive more fully the gift of God's grace. The Bishop pointed out to Jean Val Jean that the Kingdom of God was at hand. The Bishop removed roadblocks and barriers and brought the Kingdom of God right to the doorstep of Jean Val Jean's heart. The Bishop challenged Jean Val Jean to respond. The Bishop said that he was giving Jean Val Jean's soul to God.

So with that being his new reality how would Jean Val Jean respond? Would Jean Val Jean give his life to transformation? Would Jean Val Jean become a new person or would he stay stuck in his old ways of living? Would Jean Val Jean enter the huge, expansive, filled with possibility world of God's grace and power or would he stay stuck in his limited world of brokenness? What would Jean Val Jean choose?

What will we choose? Will we live a life in response to God's grace? Does our baptism mean anything to us? Has our baptism lead us into the expansive, filled with possibility realm of God's Kingdom? Have we recognized that God's Kingdom is near? Does our life waft up to God as a pleasing aroma? Those are great questions for us to ponder this Advent.

Prepare the Way: While it is essential for us to consider those questions for our own lives, it is also imperative that we consider our role in preparing the way for others. How can we be the bishop for the people that God brings into our lives? How can we rock people's world with God's grace? How can we bring the Kingdom of God to people's doorsteps, so that they can't ignore the reality? How can we make the way smooth for others to know the gift of following the Jesus Way? These too are critical questions for our Advent reflection.

Conclusion: "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." Like John we too live in a wilderness, so let us be a group of people who give themselves to preparing the way of the Lord. God's Kingdom is near let us make the path straight for ourselves and those God brings into our lives. Let us embrace the Advent Journey. Let us open our hearts to the transforming power of God's grace. How will we respond to the gift? Will the people around us breathe in the exquisite fragrance of our lives? Will the living of our lives rise up to God with a sweet scent? Let our Advent reflection, leading to response, begin. Amen.