

November 30th – Tuesday

Centering Breath Prayer: Child of hope...help me prepare the way.

Opening Prayer:

Lord of my heart, I come today to help to prepare the way for your coming anew in my heart and in my daily life. Walk with me today and help me to smooth out the bumps and twists along the road so that we may walk safely and harmoniously on the journey. Show me how to enter more fully into the Kingdom of God. In your enlightening name, I pray. Amen.

Scripture: Matthew 3:1-6

Key Verses: Matthew 3:1-3: (1) “In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea (2) and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’ (3) This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: ‘A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him’” (NIV).

As is so true of much in the scriptures, today’s lesson deals with both the “now” and the “not yet.” Any time we talk about the Kingdom of God (or heaven in today’s scripture) we get into that strange dichotomy. Two thousand years ago John the Baptizer announced the coming of Christ by crying out to “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.*” His mission was to “*Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.*” This last was a direct quote from Isaiah 40:3 which goes on to say, “*Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain*” (Isaiah 40:4 NIV). The real question then becomes: How does one prepare the way for the Lord by repenting and what does it all have to do with the Kingdom of God?

We have all heard the word “repent.” For most of us it holds a connotation of being sorry for something we have done and desiring that it had never happened and usually a promise to not do it again. It requires making a change in the direction our lives are taking. John intimates that in repentance we are “*prepar[ing] the way for the Lord, mak[ing] straight paths for him.*” Isaiah uses further language of building “*a highway for our God*” (Isaiah 40:3b NIV) including raising valleys, removing hills and mountains, and smoothing out the rough ground and the rugged places. It means taking the journey of love along side the Lord by removing obstacles which would stand between us. Some of these obstacles are behaviors which need to be removed or remodeled in our lives. Others are attitudes which need to be altered. Some are simple bumps which would irritate and others are major boulders or chasms which break the journey and need major work to remove. Some are easy to recognize and others are more obscure, needing the illumination of God’s ways to recognize. Repentance is the desire to make the adjustments in our lives which enables God to work within us freely.

John’s voice calling in the desert still reaches us today. Repentance is still needed if we are to walk in the Kingdom of God. There are still valleys and hills and mountains and rough ground and rugged places in our lives which need leveling and

smoothing. Thankfully we are not required to make these changes by ourselves. We are given tools and companions to work with as we make the journey. We band ourselves together in communities of faith to encourage one another and to learn more about the kingdom as we go. We have scriptures to guide us and most of all, the Spirit of God within us to illuminate the way. This time we spend together is a part of that process, preparing the way of the Lord in us during this holiday season. It is a waiting time, but it is an active waiting, not sitting passively along the side of the road. It is a time of “now” while we live in the presence of God in our every moment and a time of “not yet” when promises of glory and peace and rewards have still not arrived, but we understand are awaiting us. As we continue the journey there are many things left to be done, but Immanuel is still with us and his love still sustains us. So let us, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.*”

Additional Scriptures: Isaiah 40:1-5

Questions for reflection and/or journaling:

1. What do I think of when I hear the word: repent?
2. What are some of the behaviors and attitudes I know need to be changed in my life?
3. Do I turn towards the Lord for help in making the changes I know are necessary for me to prepare the highway for the Lord in my life?

Suggestions for action:

1. Word for your tree: **REPENT**
2. Choose one behavior or attitude that you listed above to work on today.
3. Prayerfully seek God’s Spirit to help you work on it throughout the day. Remember, Immanuel is always with you.

Closing Prayer:

Immanuel, I come today to repent, to make a change of direction in my life. I know that I cannot change my attitudes and behaviors all at once and that you will work within me to desire and to do your will. Today I take a step in the right direction, knowing that you meet me in that step and that by taking it I am walking in your kingdom. Thank you for your company along the way. Be my guide for each step I take, and when I begin to stray from the path, gently nudge me back in the right direction. In your ever present name, I pray. Amen.