

Sermon: “Home or Heart?”

Scripture: Matthew 3: 1-12

Date: December 9, 2007 (Second Sunday of Advent)

Denbigh Presbyterian Church

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Preparations are underway in many of our homes. We are preparing for Christmas by readying our homes in some manner.

For most, this involves some rearranging. Sometimes furniture has to be repositioned or removed altogether to accommodate the Christmas tree. Sometimes a mantle or sideboard is cleared and given a good dusting for a nativity. This business of rearranging is one of several reasons why my husband—a distant relative of Ebenezer Scrooge—dislikes holiday decorating.

Yet, it was Dan who initiated moving our unsightly computer “array” from our family room before he left for Belgium last week. He said (much to my surprise): “I thought I’d make room for the Christmas tree.” Thinking that he might also be planning for us to put up the tree and decorate before he departed for Belgium, I found myself thinking: “Who are you and what have you done with my husband?”

Alas, Dan was just doing the “advance work” . . . preparing the way . . . doing some of the necessary rearranging, repositioning and removal to make room for the tree (which may or may not be put up prior to his return!)

Advent, we’re reminded, is to be a season of preparing the way—preparing the way of the Lord. During Advent, we remember that Christ has come, Christ comes to us even now to meet us where we are, and Christ will come again at the end of the age.

To be prepared to remember Christ’s birth, we have to ready our hearts. To be prepared to recognize the ways Christ comes to us—arrives in our lives even now—we must ready our hearts. To be prepared for Christ’s second coming, we need to ready our hearts.

How do we do this? John the Baptist’s words spoken centuries ago still tell us how to ready our hearts and to make room for Jesus. Repent. Rearrange your priorities; reposition your life so that you move in a new and different direction—away from sin, toward Jesus. Remove the stuff in your life that gets in the way of Jesus finding a ready welcome in your heart not only during Advent but also throughout the year. Dust off the residue of resistance. Make room, rearrange, reposition, remove, dust off and clean up. Prepare the way of the Lord.

Listen again to portions of the Gospel lesson from Eugene Peterson's translation *The Message*.

“While Jesus was living in the Galilean hills, John, called ‘the Baptizer,’ was preaching in the desert country of Judea. His message was simple and austere, like his desert surroundings: ‘Change your life. God’s kingdom is here.’ John and his message were authorized by Isaiah’s prophecy: ‘Thunder in the desert! Prepare for God’s arrival! Make the road smooth and straight!’

“When John realized that a lot of Pharisees and Sadducees were showing up for a baptismal experience because it was becoming the popular thing to do, he exploded: ‘Brood of snakes! What do you think you’re doing slithering down here to the river? Do you think a little water on your snakeskins is going to make any difference? It’s your life that must change, not your skin! And don’t think you can pull rank by claiming Abraham as father. Being a descendant of Abraham is neither here nor there. Descendants of Abraham are a dime a dozen. What counts is your life. Is it green and blossoming? Because if it’s deadwood, it goes on the fire.

“I’m baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. The real action comes next . . . Jesus is going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He’ll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he’ll put out with the trash to be burned.”

Sometimes we might be like the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to John at the Jordan River. They were Jewish leaders—knowledgeable, outwardly devout, law-abiding religious people. They were ready for anything. We might presume that we are ready—ready for Jesus. After all, we come to church, give money, serve in leadership, and have a good Christian pedigree. We are knowledgeable, outwardly devout, law-abiding religious people. Is there really all that much we need to rearrange, reposition, remove, or dust off to make room for Jesus and his high calling? Is there really all that much in our lives that needs a clean sweep?

When Dan removed our computer “array” from the family room to make room for the tree, we found more dirt than we expected—dirt no one could see or get to until we cleaned out the stuff. A clean sweep was needed far more than we realized.

John put it this way: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” As we repent, we make room for Jesus. Let us join John in preparing the way of the Lord. Let us prepare our hearts, even as we prepare our homes.