

## Sermon: Prepare the way!

*Isaiah 40,1-5 Prepare the way! Clear the path! Let it be raised! Let the mountain fall!*

King Cyrus II, the Great of Persia is historically significant for his conquest of Babylonia and the creation of the largest empire of his time. It also included Judea and Jerusalem, which was sacked by the Babylonians in 587 BC. The city was destroyed and the Jewish population taken into captivity. After 70 years of oppression (538 B.C.), suppression of national identity and belief in one God, it was Cyrus II the Great who released the Jewish people from captivity back home to Judea to rebuild Jerusalem, the city and the temple, and to be free to worship the Lord in their own land.

These historical events, because of the great hope they hold, foreshadow the coming of the messiah and spiritual revival. We can and should expect a change for the better with Advent, that the "glory of the Lord" will finally be revealed, that deliverance will come from something that has been troubling you, that perhaps you will rekindle a spiritual longing, or simply that God will have mercy on you and forgive you. But this great prophecy about Cyrus and the coming deliverance, the return to Jerusalem, spiritual renewal and revival, God's grace and forgiveness begins with important words:

"Prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be exalted, let every mountain and high place be made low; let what is rugged be made level, let the hills be a plain."

Isaiah says, "Yes! Change will come! But if you want it to affect you, you must first prepare your way!" Level it, remove obstacles, and dig ditches. Tackle anything that might hinder or even kill the spiritual life within you.

The first obstacle that most often kills our spiritual life is busyness and the resulting stress and tension. It works like this: the hyenas cannot overcome the lion in the prime of life. That's why they try to annoy him, taunt him, and try to wear him down until he is completely exhausted. Once they see that the lion can't defend itself, they start to close in around it. In our time, the enemy's strategy is to engage and drive. Nine times out of ten, people will say, "I'm not going to be a lion." I'm too busy..." The deadly plan is, "It keeps them on the move. Then they won't have time to worry about their hearts. We'll make sure they burn out and then we'll get them."

What can we do about it during Advent and the anticipation of Christmas? Don't be afraid to go against the tide, against the Christmas mainstream. Stop and take the time to CREATE your own life. What does it look like to take back control of your life? The time that helps you sort out what really matters, what's hurting you and what's benefiting you. You find that you need to stop and be silent before God in prayer, that you need to take time to absorb and realize all the good that God is including you in and that that is enough, that you need plenty of sleep and rest when you are "doing nothing" but your mind and heart are catching up with real life.

You have 4 weeks of Advent and 1 week of Christmas to deal with this killer of your spiritual life. Work your way to be ready for His coming.

The second obstacle that most often kills our spiritual life is consumerism and the resulting emptiness. A Christian walks into a shopping mall - he is exhausted, overwhelmed by life, and has little time for God (he is busy). Suddenly he hears that if he gets this and that, he will be better off. He knows a lot about advertising, but still ... and he goes and buys and buys ... Sometimes he wonders if he's overdoing it a bit, but suddenly he hears a still small voice, the six holy lies: you deserve it, you need it to live, everybody has it, it makes you feel happy, you need it to rest and relax, you do it for your family ... Because I "need it badly" and sometimes I can't afford it, I must borrow it. To pay back or buy more, I must work harder and harder. The result is not only discouragement and irritability, but more importantly, a loss of relationship with God. God will wait, earning will not wait.

The things we seek after, but more and more often the stimuli we just gobble up (consume), separate us from real life. They are like hills that keep us busy and distract us from the substance of life. The more things, the more worries and the more complicated life becomes. The more stimuli, the less depth in understanding our own lives and the world around us.

What can we do about this during Advent and the anticipation of Christmas? Don't be afraid to go against the tide, against the Christmas mainstream. REDEFINE your life by letting go of unnecessary things and unnecessary stimuli. Let's try to give each other less stuff and more attention for each other, and attention for our God, this Christmas. Ditch the millions of stimuli that bombard your mind and distract you every day - let your phone lie aside more often. Yes, you will need strong discipline to do this. Humility and renunciation are an important spiritual discipline that keeps our lives from becoming so convoluted that the unobtrusive still small voice of God can no longer reach our hearts.

You have 4 weeks of Advent and 1 week of Christmas to deal with this killer of your spiritual life. Throw off the mountains of stuff that clutters your life. Every mountain and hill that might get in the way so that you will be ready for His coming, LET IT GO!

The third obstacle that most often kills our spiritual life is alienation in relationships and the resulting loneliness.

You may say to yourself, but this is not a Christmas problem. After all, people get together at Christmas and are nice to each other! But it is against the backdrop of Christmas color that mutual alienation often stands out. We get together with those we love. Together are those who have someone. The contrast is the greater where relationships are broken, or where relationships are absent and loneliness prevails, where we are coping with the loss of someone close to us. Those who are on the edge are even more on the edge at Christmas.

In the Old Testament (5M22:1) it says, "If you see your brother's bull or sheep wandering, do not be indifferent, but honestly bring them back to your brother." It is easy to say that my brother's (fellow citizen's) problem does not concern me, but indifference kills the spirit of God in us and reduces the chances of God's kingdom being spread from person to person.

What can we do about it during Advent and the anticipation of Christmas? Don't be afraid to go against the tide, against the Christmas mainstream .... Try to bridge, diminish or preferably COMPLETELY BURN THE STREAM of indifference. Is there a relationship you must fix or that you can improve? A relationship in which it would be good to shorten the distance, take a step forward, make things right? Is there an opportunity to show interest, to invite someone into your home?

You have 4 weeks of Advent and 1 week of Christmas to deal with alienation and indifference, this killer of your spiritual life. STOP THE STUMBLES in your path to be ready for His coming.

Matthew 3:1-3 "Repent! The kingdom of heaven is at hand!" "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord! Make his paths straight!'"

Isaiah's words echo again 700 years later. This time the savior is not an earthly king, but the child born in Bethlehem, God's son Jesus Christ. How prepared we are determining how much we ourselves will be part of the change He brings. The Kingdom of God is at hand, but we can miss it. By no means all Jews took the opportunity to return to Jerusalem, some were too settled in Babylon, they had their comforts, their worries, their connections and economic interests... and they didn't want to go to simple, destroyed Jerusalem.

But if you want to experience Jerusalem at Christmas and not Babylon, then you must think differently. Your journey must take a different direction! That's why John the Baptist is calling - repent - change the direction you are going so you don't miss the Kingdom of God that is coming.