

“The Call to Prepare”

Polo First United Methodist Church
Polo, IL

Isaiah 40:1-11

Mark 1:1-8

December 4, 2011 (2nd Sunday of Advent)

Prayer: Savior Christ, calm us now into a quietness that heals and listens. Open wounded hearts to the balm of your Word. Speak to us in clear tones so that we might feel our spirits leap for joy and skip with hope as we watch and wait for you. Amen.

Is the choir prepared? . . . Yeah! We’ve been practicing for months. Going through each song, part by part, note by note. We’ve definitely done all that we can do, I think. We had dress rehearsal yesterday and it seemed to go well enough. People took it seriously. I think we’re prepared.

Are you ready for the test? . . . Well . . . I guess. As ready as I’m gonna be. Right? I mean I’ve done all the reading and assignments throughout the semester. I’ve been studying for a week straight. I got a good night sleep last night. It all just kind of depends on what questions are on there I suppose. I mean, I know the answers to the multiple choice questions like the back of my hand. I’ve got them down. But those essays . . . That’ll be the tough part. Who knows which ones will be on there. I guess I’ll let you know when it’s all finished if I really was ready or not.

Are you prepared for an emergency? We couldn’t be prepared more. We have put all kinds of protocols into effect for just such a situation. We’ve had drills, practiced escape routes, drawn up diagrams of where the safe zones are. We have this high tech emergency alert system in place to immediately notify everyone if something were to happen. You’re not going to find a company that is better prepared for an emergency than we are.

Mr. Rogers, are you ready? . . . Of course I’m ready! I’ve only been waiting here for the last hour. I mean it’s a doctor’s appointment what do I have to be ready for? I’m ready to sit awkwardly on that uncomfortable paper-covered examination table. I’m ready for you to stick that needle in me. I’m ready for the doctor to tell me I really should lose some weight. I’m ready to get this over with.

Do you think you’re prepared to start the new job? I sure hope so! If not then these last seven years of school are kind of a waste don’t you think? They better have been preparing me! I guess I won’t really know until I start and get into it all. Sure, there will probably be things I’m not prepared for but that’s with everything right? Or am I just saying that because I’m not sure if I’m prepared enough or not. Were you prepared? Did you know you were prepared before you started?

Are you ready to have the baby? I think so. We've got the nursery ready for her. Painted the walls yellow, bought the crib. We've already got diapers and clothes and some toys. People were really generous at our showers. We feel comfortable with our doctor, too. He assured us that he will be here when she starts to go into labor. We packed the suitcase and have it in the car so that when she feels the baby coming we'll be ready to rush to the hospital. We're ready, we hope.

The children scattered, each one going in a different direction. One to the closet. Another to the drapes. A third threw himself under the bed. A different child stood in the corner of the room. 10, 9, 8, 7, 6-5-4-3-2, 1 . . . Ready or not, here I come!

A voice cries out in the wilderness, "Ready or not, here He comes." The prophet Isaiah says, "Make the road straight and smooth, a highway that God can drive in on. Fill in the valleys. Level off the hills. You better be prepared. You better get ready. Because here he comes!"

So . . . Are you prepared? Are you ready?

Well . . . Are you?

Of course I'm ready! I've been going to church my whole life. If I'm not ready then no one is ready. I was baptized when I was a kid. I may have been a baby, but I remember it! I won the award for best Sunday School attendance from 2nd grade through high school . . . and I would have won in 1st grade too if it wasn't for my stupid sister giving me chicken pox.

I was President of the Youth Group, I went on 10 mission trips that worked with Habitat for Humanity. I even preached a few times at my home church when I was in high school. You better believe I'm ready. I've got the books of the Bible memorized backwards and forwards.

Now I'm the Chairperson of the Trustees *and* Staff-Parish. I teach the largest Sunday School class in the church. Everyone raves about it. They learn so much, they say. I organized the benefit for the Smith girl with cancer, and delivered every single one of the Thanksgiving dinners this year. Prepared? Please, if anything I'm over prepared.

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, dressed in camel's hair, eating bugs and honey. His voice calls out, "Ready or not, here He comes! Prepare the way of the Lord. Get ready for God's arrival."

So . . . Are you ready? Are you prepared?

Well . . . Are you?

Uh . . . How exactly do I prepare for this? I mean what can I honestly do to get ready for God's coming? I doubt God will be blown away by my nicest suit and tie. Surely God won't be impressed by the renovations we did on our house. So how can I prepare?

Really, what can I do to get ready? I don't think it's about getting the right answers to Bible trivia questions. Sure, I go to church but when Jesus comes do you think he'll really care about that? I don't know. I help out in the community whenever I see the need. I try and have a quiet time of prayer and Scripture reading each morning . . . Sometimes I don't get to it, and I feel guilty . . . But, I try my best. I don't know if it's good enough for God or not . . .

When John the Baptist came onto the scene saying "Prepare the Way of the Lord." All those people flocked to the wilderness. I don't know if I've gone to the wilderness, necessarily. A lot of the time I stay safe in my careful and comfortable boundaries, my neighborhood, my work, my church. Where is the wilderness for me? If I went there would it help me to prepare? Is it the homeless shelter? Is it a conversation with that guy I don't like? I don't know . . .

And those people, when they went to the wilderness they confessed and repented of their sins. I'm reminded every day that I'm not perfect, I'm not going to stand here and tell you otherwise. I make my fair share of mistakes. I regret some things I say and do. I apologize for a lot of them. I try not to make the same mistake twice. I just hope that God can forgive me. Does that mean I'm ready? Is that what preparation is all about? I don't know . . .

With this, like so many things, I suppose there are certain things I can do to get ready but when it comes down to it maybe I'll never be fully prepared to face whatever is coming. That's me just being honest. I suppose it'll be like when I started my first job. I thought I was ready but I definitely wasn't ready. I mean sure I went to school and had a lot of training but nothing could have prepared me fully. But the people there they were gracious they helped make my job easier. They let me know what I needed to be doing. Hopefully when Jesus comes he'll be gracious, because Lord knows I'm probably not prepared like I should be.

So in the meantime I'll just wait and watch. I'll try and do what I've been taught is best. I'll love a lot, and admit my faults just as much.

Amen.