

“Make His Paths Straight” (Mark 1:1-8)

For Your Life in Christ the Week of the Second Sunday in Advent

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Saint Paul’s Lutheran Church of Irvine, CA (LC-MS)

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Introduction: Do You Have Any Regrets?

- A. Sometimes a person will announce in a prideful way that they have no regrets. That’s kind of like our saying we don’t care about what other people think. These are “boasts” that we should probably not be proud of and reconsider.
 - 1. The fact of the matter is that all of us *should* have many regrets.
 - 2. In addition, we should be very concerned about what others think as we serve and love others in the Name of Christ.
- B. But getting back to regrets...it is the key to understanding in a very simple way the biblical concept of *repent*.
 - 1. ***We may say that it means to “change one’s mind” or “to turn around,” but it also means in a very basic way: “to think after, to regret.”***
 - 2. ***To regret what? To regret the sins we’ve committed!***
- C. But what if a person pursues this arrogant and unrealistic idea of having “no regrets”? Then, they will never be sorry for the wrong they’ve committed and if that is their position, then they will never need or desire to be forgiven. And if one does not desire to be forgiven, then that person will believe they have no need for the Gospel; and no need for the Lord Jesus Christ. Needless to say, the person with no regrets has little need for Christmas.
- D. To say you have “no regrets” is the height of arrogance, not so much because of the illusion that you obviously think you’re the most important person in the universe to the extent that everyone else needs to accept you the way you are even if you step all over other people, but it is the height of arrogance

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because it says that God’s grace isn’t necessary! It faces the greatest gift of God and says, “No thanks, I don’t need that!”

- E. But if you are to truly be prepared for Christmas, then you must be realistic, you must be truthful, you must admit and confess that you have innumerable regrets.

Part I: And the Lord Gives Several Signs in Mark 1:1-8 of How We Are Called to Repent, to Confess our Regrets:

- A. Verse 3:

Mark 1:3: *“the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”*

- 1. The “wilderness” is the location of the prophet’s ministry that hearkens back to the wilderness wanderings of Israel and for that matter what sin does to our lives putting us into our personalized “wildernesses”...the point is that without God we are in a barren land, or a barren life. We need salvation. We need to know our true need and situation. We should regret the lives we try to build apart from God for they are so very dry and deadly.

Illustration: the story of a parishioner who would do anything to find a companion and how it led her to a pit of darkness, but then the Lord led her to repent and light entered her life!

- 2. Notice also that verse 3 mentions the “paths” of Christ – the paths He is interested in – are the paths that lead straight to your heart. What do you love? What do you desire? What do you live for? The Lord leads us to know that hopefully it isn’t those things that perish and fade. So we are warned this Advent not to be foolish:

1st John 2:17: “And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

3. And for our own good, the will of God is that we acknowledge our regrets and turn to His grace.

B. Verse 4-5:

Mark 1:4-5: “John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.”

1. The prophet represents the fact that God comes into our wilderness. He does NOT wait around for us to find a way out. He comes to us!
2. And then by the power of His Word (notice that John was “proclaiming”) God works regret in us so that we confess, and when we confess, we receive God’s help!
3. And that’s when God baptizes: the one full of regrets for all the terrible things they have done is the one whose sins are buried with Jesus Christ in His death. This is why regret no longer needs to fill your conscience with dread or worry: your sins have been buried under God’s saving flood that is baptism.
4. When the water covers, that “old” part of you is buried; when the water flows off, that “new” part of you is raised. You are now a new creation; with everything that causes regret FORGIVEN by the blood of Jesus Christ!

Part II: The New Creation Doesn’t Forget His or Her Moorings:

A. What was so special about John’s wardrobe and diet?

Mark 1:6: Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.”

1. These symbolize John’s total commitment to the ONLY ONE and the ONLY THING He needed. It wasn’t fancy clothes, it wasn’t extravagant meals.
2. His sole dependence was the Lord.
3. One of our devotions this past week from Lutheran Hour Ministries was how so often we base the quality of our Christmas’ on our bank account. But we were reminded of that first Christmas: look at what Christ had. Better said, look at what Christ **didn’t have! And yet He had everything He needed...in fact, He had everything WE NEED!**
4. The reminder here is that when we have received God’s grace for our regrets, we train ourselves to remember **there is really nothing else we need!**

B. And so we also live in the humility of sinners forgiven:

Mark 1:7-8: “And he preached, saying, ‘After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’”

1. “to stoop down” = the feeling of unworthiness that keeps us worshipping the Lord!
2. “with the Holy Spirit” = the guarantee of His grace that we are in Christ. The Holy Spirit keeps us confessing His grace!

Conclusion: Our regrets have been given to Christ, so that we may live NEW LIVES in Christ who covers our regrets with HIS GRACE!