



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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December 1, 2010
Midweek Advent Worship
Sermon Text: [Isaiah 40:3-5](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

Prepare for the Lord

During this time of the year, we are busy with a lot of preparations, getting decorations out and hung, gifts purchased and wrapped and hid, or whatever else we might do. It's kind of interesting at these Wednesday services to pause, slow down and reflect on how God prepared the world for Christ's coming, and how God prepared people for the first Christmas. He did it in a way that I would say is really kind of counter-cultural to our culture today. Our culture today focuses a lot on immediacy and satisfying things now. Our culture isn't real patient. But our Lord teaches patience through Scripture. He promises and he promises and he promises and he finally keeps those promises, but not in our time and in our way, but in his time and in his way. But there is no denying that he prepares us for the things he wants us to focus on.

In Isaiah 40, he talks about preparing a royal highway. He talks about making straight for the king the valleys and leveling the hills and removing all the obstacles so that if the king is coming, he comes on a very smooth road and isn't disturbed. Evidently this was a practice at that point in time. Kings would send out people to try to make his arrival smoother in the town. I don't know how many of them really had the resources to go to the extremes that Isaiah talks about in Chapter 40...every mountain knocked down and every valley raised up. That's a picture of incredible effort.

Where I lived in Minnesota, there was a curve down the road from the church that went from the level of the road down a stream at a right angle and then another right angle and then back up. That's the way I had to go to the other church, and when it was snowy and wintery, it was kind of scary at times making those curves and going down those hills. Before I left, they had a major road improvement project and they actually built the road up completely and took the curve out. After that I could make time on Sunday morning in between those services. There was no longer a problem of worrying about ending up flipped over in the ditch down there. It was really nice. That's kind of what he is picturing.

That's the way he talks about for us preparing this royal highway for our king coming, the king that he promised and the king that seems to take so long to get here at times that we just don't want to wait to celebrate. We just nowadays start celebrating it now. God prepared the people and had them wait and prepared them really by this leveling of the roadbed, making sure the roadbed was secure and solid and firm so that it could be built on. That's kind of what he is talking about here with leveling out these hills and filling up these valleys.

I grew up in Michigan and I watched the road in front of our house, which had all kinds of trucks go over it and all kinds of cars go over it because Hemlock Semiconductor and Dow Corning was a quarter mile up the road. Year after year all they did was just fill in potholes and never really do anything to it. It was just an awful road. You could not drive at the other end of it more than 35 miles per hour. Now they have repaired it all, but one of the things that struck me is, compared to Michigan's approach, when I'm out in South Dakota, I drive from South Shore to Watertown, and it's a really nice, straight drive. There's no hills or valleys out there where we are. On the highway or the interstate, you can go 75 miles per hour. Right now they're tearing up one side and you are both on the same side of the road, and they still let you go 65 miles per hour, which is really nice so you can get there pretty quick.

As I've been going back and forth, when I've been out there, you see these huge machines they've got that have just torn everything up and taken everything down I don't know how many feet, and then laid this foundation so that the roadbed can withstand the freezing and the heat and all the different variances in temperatures they get out there. You can see the amount of time and energy they are putting into it. That's kind of what God is describing here. For his king to come into our hearts, we need to level the roadbed. We need to make certain preparations.

But they aren't the preparations we always want to make in our society. Our preparations consist of turning our radios in our car to the station that talks about sleigh bells and reindeer on the rooftop and some fat guy in a red suit kissing our spouse, and we consider that our preparations to get into the holiday spirit. We put all the lights up and we do all these things. There isn't anything inherently wrong with any of those things, but do we remember why it is that we are doing them, or are we just so caught up in doing them every year that we think, "Now is the day I do this. Now is when I get this done." Do we stop and think why? Do we level the roadbed?

When God is talking about knocking the hills down and filling the valleys and making the road straight, do you understand what he is talking about? Did you hear it? Did you hear the fulfillment of this? The fulfillment of this was John the Baptist. I'm guaranteeing you that you cannot go to any Menards in this country and find the John the Baptist plastic thing to put in your front yard for your Christmas celebration. It just isn't going to happen. John the Baptist was a preacher of repentance. He wasn't a snowman that came to life and sang. He said, "You guys are filthy rotten. If you want to be ready for the Savior to come, you need to turn away from your own sins. You need to recognize just how desperately you need a Savior." Those words that I read to you from Luke, put those to a catchy Christmas tune. See how much air time that gets at this time of the year.

Think of everything that we do. Everything we do as Christians flows from this solid foundation of this level roadbed of repentance, of seeing ourselves for what we are, not what we think we are, but for what we really are. We are filthy rotten sinners who on our best day have nothing to offer to God. That's why God, to prepare his people, to level his roadbed, sent John the Baptist to preach repentance and kind of wake people

up so that when the Christ comes, they'd be ready. They'd be looking for the right kind of Savior. And for those who didn't get the memo or were focused on something else, they lost the blessings, didn't they.

This time of the year every year, the first week of Advent, we talk about "prepare." The second Sunday of Advent is always "John the Baptist Sunday." We'll hear one of the Gospels read to us basically along the same lines of what I read to you tonight. I remember in Minnesota when I preached on what the point of Gospel was, I had some guy come up who was less than happy with me as a young pastor. He said, "Why are you talking about repentance so much? Don't you know Christmas is coming?" He chewed me up and down and tried every way he could think of to make me feel like a fool. I smiled and I stewed. I didn't say what I was thinking or do what I wanted to do. But I became convinced I did what God had called me to do, which is to get the roadbed level and preach repentance so that we see we need a Savior. Because then you see all these Christmas traditions that we do to celebrate, they start to have a real meaning.

The lights that we hang remind us that Jesus Christ is the light of the world. And without him, we live in a darkness that is eternal. It isn't just to be festive. It's to remind us of that truth. The gifts that we give are not just there so that we can feel good about ourselves or see a smile on someone else's face. They are there to remind us, literally remind us that God gave us the most essential gift ever. He gave us his glory. The glory of the Lord will be revealed. He himself became one of us and lived and died in our place to take away our sins and gave us this forgiveness and this new life and this salvation. Then, in some amazing twist, he sees fit to reveal his glory today through us who have had our roadbed leveled. We've been knocked off our high horses and thinking so much about ourselves and focus on God and see what an incredible God we have.

Then we have the opportunity not to be rushed and be hurried throughout this season like so many people are. We can take the time to see in the things that we do, not just a little "made in Hong Kong" ceramic doodad on the corner of an end table that says "Jesus is the reason for the season," but to have that truly be our life's purpose. There isn't a season of the year that he isn't the reason for it, is there?

That's only going to happen when you and I take the time to be honest and level the roadbed and see that the God who shows us our sin is the God who sends the Spirit into our hearts to work faith in our Savior so that we know that our sins are forgiven and we know that he will work through people like you and me. That's how he has seen fit to act.

During this time, level your roadbed and rejoice in your Savior.