

Sermon December 6th, 2020

God Makes Us New

An old friend calls you up out of the blue. They are passing through Calgary, and want to stay at your place for a couple of days. You have not seen this friend for years. You remember all the good times you had. You get excited for their arrival. You start to clean the house from top to bottom. Getting into all those corners and areas you usually leave for Spring cleaning (**Image**). You fill the cupboards with goodies. You write down all the cool things you can do together. Like climbing up to the top of the Calgary Tower (**Image**) or seeing all the cool animals at the Calgary zoo or taking a day trip to the mountains (**Image**). Okay. I should stop there before I start sounding like a travel agent. Anyways, you are excited about this upcoming visit, and want everything to go well. So, you diligently prepare for your friend's visit.

In our gospel this morning, John the Baptist is excited about the arrival of a somewhat familiar guest. Jesus is coming to visit him at the river. Now, in Luke's gospel, we find out that John and Jesus are related. So, in a way this could be seen as a reunion between cousins (**Image**). Though we know by John's preaching that Jesus' coming to the river isn't just about reconnecting with a distant relative. Jesus is coming with a purpose. Jesus is coming to save God's people.

John isn't just excited that Jesus his cousin is coming. John is excited that the Messiah is about to arrive on the scene to start the liberation movement that will hopefully free his people from oppression.

In response to this excitement, John starts preparing the way for Jesus' coming. For Jesus' ministry to begin. John talks up Jesus to the people. Getting the rest of the crowd excited about Jesus' coming. John shares with the people what Jesus is going to do when he arrives.

John invites the people to repent and be cleansed with water through baptism (**Image**). This was to prepare their hearts for Jesus to enter. If they can cleanse themselves from all the guilt they are feeling, from all the times they fell short, then they will be receptive to Jesus' words of grace and forgiveness. If they can let go of the baggage that keeps them from fully loving God, and their neighbour, then they will be able to take up their

crosses and follow Jesus. If they can commit to changing their direction, their course, then they will be ready to hear Jesus' transformative message that will challenge the societal norms they are living with. The norms that are hurting them, but the norms that they are also used to living by.

Now you have been preparing for weeks for your friend to arrive. You have never cleaned so diligently. You have never seen so many snacks in your pantry. Just 24 hours to go. You have been very excited up to this point, but as time ticks away you start to feel a little anxious. As the memories start flooding back you remember that your friendship didn't end on the best of terms. In fact, there has always been a small part of you that wonders why your friend has decided to reconnect with you. You start to discover that you may have a few wounds left over from how your friendship ended.

Now who knows where your friend is at with how things went down. Maybe they have forgotten about the whole thing since it was quite a long time ago or maybe they are coming to reconcile with you. You can speculate all you want about your friend's reasons for coming. But if your heart isn't in a healthy place you may find that this visit will be a lot more stressful than enjoyable.

So, you decide to take some time here before your friend arrives to cleanse your heart. Whether it is repent for the things you brought to the conflict that led to the end of the friendship or whether it is letting go of the baggage you carry with you from the conflict, so you are able to forgive. Wherever you see your responsibility in the fall out of the relationship, you find a way to cleanse your heart to prepare for reconciliation. Whether it is through prayer (**Image**), or through confession, or through reconnecting with your baptism in a rite like affirmation of baptism, or through meditation, or through communion, or through reflecting on the Word, or through music, or through talking it out with someone (**Image**). Like you prepared your house, you now prepare your heart for the coming of your friend.

John comes to prepare our hearts for Jesus to come. John calls us to repentance. To cleanse our hearts so we are ready to accept the forgiveness Jesus has to offer us. John calls us to the waters of baptism as a sign of this repentance. As a physical taste of Christ's reconciling work that reconciles us with our Creator and with one another. John calls us to

receive the gift Jesus is going to offer us. The Holy Spirit, which gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies us.

Jesus reiterates this message throughout his ministry. Jesus invites us to repent. To open our hearts to hear what Jesus has to say. To receive the gift of the Holy Spirit that gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies us. To experience new life through God's reconciling love.

And so, whether it is an opportunity to reconcile with an old friend (**Image**), or reconnecting with God after going our own way for a while, or longing to hear a message of hope and promise of new life in the midst of our brokenness. Our Advent Season invites us to reflect on John's message. Jesus' message. Mark's message. And take time to prepare our hearts and minds for what Jesus has in store for us. The healing of our wounds. The restoration of our broken relationships. The gift of the Holy Spirit that empowers us to reflect Christ's message of transformative love to our neighbours. The gift of new life that renews us, and our world.

Let us pray, gracious God, we give thanks that you send people into our lives through the Holy Scriptures to prepare our hearts to listen to your hopeful promise of healing and restoration. We give thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit that gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies us. We pray that you empower us to repent when we are dealing with guilt that is separating us from our neighbours and from you. We pray that you guide us to seek out practices in our faith traditions that help us cleanse our hearts from the wounds, the baggage we carry within us. So, our hearts are ready to experience your reconciling love. **Amen.**

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