

"The Kyrie"

Mark 1:1-8

December 10, 2023

## I. The Lord Comes

"Prepare the way of the LORD; Make his paths straight!"

John the Baptist is the preacher who fulfills this prophecy. It was Isaiah who uttered it by the Lord's inspiration in Isaiah 40, our Old Testament Lesson. Not only does he foretell John the Baptist, the voice crying in the wilderness, but he also tells what John will proclaim: "Prepare the way of the LORD!"

The LORD-all capital letters-is coming. Yahweh Himself is on the way.

But is this good news? Yahweh is holy and righteous, a consuming fire that destroys sin and unrepentant sinners. When Moses came down from Mt. Sinai and God's presence, his face glowed for weeks; do these people listening to John the Baptist really want to risk seeing the Lord when He comes? They're sinful-that's why they've gone to John in the wilderness. They are far from holy, and are fearful of God's wrath-wrath that they deserve. Do they really want the Lord to come?

Isaiah 40 should set them at ease, because the prophet declares that the Lord comes to save. He comes to comfort His people-to declare the end of warfare – not earthly warfare, but the war that exists between a holy

God and His unholy people. He comes to pardon His people's iniquity. He comes to declare abundant grace in His eternal Word. He comes with a strong hand to shepherd His sheep and hold them dear. He is not coming with wrath, but with grace. He isn't going to give them what they deserve for their sins. The Lord is coming to have mercy.

And so His way must be prepared. If the Lord comes in power and glory, no preparation is needed -- for no one can resist His appearance or strength. This is how it will be on the Last Day. But when He comes on the banks of the Jordan, He comes to have mercy; and He will not force His mercy on anyone. He comes with love and

forgiveness, but He will not coerce anyone to be loved or forgiven. If they wish to remain in bondage to sin and condemned, He will not force them to be pardoned and saved. The people must be prepared along the Lord's way, so that they are ready to receive the mercy He brings.

This is the task of John the Baptist, preparing the way. If people are going to rejoice in the Lord's mercy, they must first understand how much they need it. With physical sickness, it is easy -- the leper looks at the decay in his body and earnestly desires a cure. With sin it's more difficult, because people naturally believe they are good enough. They must hear differently. This is why

John the Baptist must preach to them a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. He must tell them of their sin. He must tell them that they deserve God's wrath and punishment. When they understand that they do not deserve grace and life, they will be ready to hear that their sins are pardoned. They will be ready to receive what they don't deserve. They will be ready for the Lord's mercy.

So John preaches a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Some will hear and repent; others will close their ears and puff their chests. Either way, the Lord is coming -- about to arrive on the scene. He will be merciful to those who repent, to those who have heard

the preparing message of God's Law and their sin. He will have mercy, too, for those who reject the message and do not repent. But if they reject the truth of their sin, they will also reject the Lord's mercy.

The Lord is coming, nearly there. The Word spreads, and all of Judea goes out to John, waiting for the arrival of the merciful Lord.

When the Lord comes, true to His Word He lives a life of mercy. Mercifully, He masks His glory in human flesh, lest His holiness destroy sinners as they deserve. Mercifully, He heals the sick and demon-possessed. There are many in such dire straits, and they have been prepared for His

appearance; the Word has spread that the merciful Lord is here, that He is able to make the blind see and the mute tongue shout for joy. They wait for the Lord's coming; and when He appears, they waste no time.

Two blind men cry out, "Have mercy" in Matt chapter 9. They have done nothing for the Lord so that He owes them, but He heals them all the same. Why? Because He has come to have mercy, not to give them what they deserve. Instead of judgment, He gives them sight.

A Canaanite woman pleads with the Lord, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David. My daughter is severely demon-possessed" (Matt. 15:22). This woman from a

pagan clan has no leverage to make Jesus listen. But He does not treat her based upon who she is, but who He is; and He is the Lord who comes to have mercy. Her daughter is delivered that day.

Ten lepers with no hope left wait dying on a lonely border. The disease in their bodies has preached to them their need for miraculous healing, and the Word about Jesus' miracles has spread even to them. When they see Him, they cry out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" (Lk. 17:13). He cleanses them. Is their love and devotion to God enough to save them? Hardly. Nine out of ten run away without saying thanks. The Lord doesn't stop them

or execute them on the spot, because the Lord comes to have mercy.

This is how the ministry of Jesus goes, all the way to the cross. Wherever the Lord comes, people who have been prepared by hearing of Him gather in His way. And because He is there, present with them, they cry out to Him for mercy. They receive mercy in the form of physical healing and exorcisms, it is true. But there is more mercy; on more than one occasion, the Lord says to those healed, "Your faith has saved you." Ultimately, the Lord comes to be merciful by forgiving sins -- by giving eternal life.

It is this mercy that determines His destination. Mercifully, He was born to Mary and masked His glory in human flesh. Mercifully, He heals and forgives throughout His ministry. Now, mercifully, He goes to the cross.

He must be crucified in order to be merciful. Remember, this is the Son of God, the second person of Trinity. He is equally Yahweh with God the Father -- holy and righteous, a consuming fire that destroys sin. Therefore, when He is merciful to sinners, the Lord cannot just excuse sin; He cannot just pretend it does not exist, for it is a terrible offense to His very nature. The sinner deserves God's wrath and judgment for sin, and the

Lord's mercy does not make that wrath and judgment vanish or disappear. He can't make God's judgment go away; but He can shift its target. He puts Himself into the crosshairs and He puts Himself on the cross.

The Lord comes to have mercy. Look to the cross to see how great His mercy is. You deserve God's wrath for your sin. In His mercy, the Lord does not give you the wrath that **you** deserve; He **Himself** accepts and receives the wrath that you deserve. He suffers that judgment for you, and for the whole world; and His suffering there is sufficient for your redemption. He has won double the pardon for all of your sins.

## II. Kyrie Elieison

The Lord is merciful. You know this, and that is part of why you are here. If the Lord were hostile and unrelenting, what would be the point? You could, at best, hope for a halfway decent life before the beginning of judgment. But the Lord is merciful, and that is part of why you are here.

There is another reason why you are here: The merciful Lord comes. He has come for you, of course, by His incarnation, ministry and death. But the Lord still comes for you, here and now. Prepare the way.

Our Sunday morning service begins with the order of Confession and Absolution. According to God's Word, we confess that we are poor, miserable sinners who justly deserve His wrath and punishment. We confess that these sins are wrong, and thus we voice our repentance. Then we hear the Absolution, as the pastor declares, "In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." The Word of God which he speaks declares to you that your sins are forgiven; that forgiveness renews your Baptism, where the Lord first washed you clean and made you His own.

This is how the service begins, before our Lord comes to us further in His Word and in His holy Supper. Confession and Absolution prepares us for His coming. In other words, we, like the people of John's day, are prepared by Baptism, repentance and the remission of sins.

So He comes. He is truly present with us in His Word and Sacrament. The Lord comes, fully God and fully man. He is just as present with us as He was when He stood with the ten lepers or debated the Canaanite woman or made blind men see. He is here, and He is here to have mercy.

This is why, along with the Introit, we begin the Service of the Word with the words of lepers, blind men and Canaanite women. We sing the Kyrie: "Lord, have mercy

upon us; Christ, have mercy upon us; Lord have mercy upon us." The Lord comes, and the Lord comes to have mercy.

This is a simple, seemingly absurd, point, but please bear with me: People cried out "Lord, have mercy" because Jesus was there. When Jesus was standing in the streets of Jericho, men and women in Jerusalem did not cry out "Lord, have mercy" to thin air. They cried out when they were in His presence. And so do we. As we sing the Kyrie, we are acknowledging the fact that the Lord is here, fully present even though unseen. He comes to have mercy; so by His Word, He announces to you your sinfulness and your need for salvation. And when He has

thus prepared your hearts, He says to you, "Your iniquity is pardoned, and you have received double the grace for all of your sins. So He has mercy upon you; the forgiveness that He won on the cross is placed into your ears when you His Gospel proclaimed. It is placed into your mouth as the present, merciful Lord says, "Take and eat, this is My body...take and eat, this is My blood...for the forgiveness of sins."

So the Lord has mercy upon you. He does not punish you for your sins. Instead, He has deflected His holy wrath upon Himself, and declares you are forgiven instead.

The Lord is present, and the Lord is present to be merciful to you. Do you realize the import of these words? As you gather here, you can be confident that the Lord is not against you. He does not seek your doom for your sins; if He did, He would not come to be merciful. If He did, you would be in no position to hear this. He comes to have mercy; and if He comes to have mercy, then He will work in all things to have mercy upon you. Therefore, as you gather here to receive mercy from Him, you can commend all things to Him.

Attacked by the devil, people cried out, "Lord have mercy!" when Jesus came. He delivered them. At times, Satan will plague you with devilish thoughts of

temptation, of guilt over past sins, of shame over failure, of doubts in God's love. His purpose is to make you believe that God could not possibly be merciful to the likes of you. But the devil is a liar. When he afflicts you with such ideas, you cry out the Kyrie -- "Lord, have mercy!" And as you cry out, you do so with the confidence that the prayer is already answered. The devil will howl and rage to make you doubt, but the Lord has already declared, "Your iniquity is pardoned, and you have received double the grace for all your sins." The Lord is merciful to you. You will, at times, still be plagued with such thoughts and doubts, but the Lord's Word of mercy is sure. Therefore, He uses even those temptations for your good; daily, they remind you that

you cannot save yourself. Daily, they move you to repentance and faith in the one who has saved you.

When plagued by sickness in the Gospels, people cried out "Lord, have mercy!" when the Lord was present with them; and, present with them, He healed them. The Lord is present with you, too. Therefore, because He is present, you also cry out the Kyrie -- "Lord have mercy!" He does. He has taken on human flesh in part to redeem your body from the effects of sin. He promises healing to you. That healing may be in the form of renewed vigor in this life; it may be in the form of deliverance from this world to eternal glory, just as he delivered Mildred Schwermann, Sylvia Klarenbach and Frank

Folkman this past year. But you can be sure that illness and even death is not proof of God's anger at you, because God declares that He comes to comfort you. He does have mercy and He will heal; and in the meantime, He will even use ill health for your good, that you might trust in His promises all the more.

Troubled by hardship, people cried out, "Lord have mercy." When you are troubled, you cry out the same; because the Lord is here and the Lord is here to be merciful. So you commend all of your cares and worries to Him, whatever they may be. You will be tempted to believe that you are desolate because God is angry with you. He is not; and because Christ has redeemed you,

the Lord promises provision, not desolation. And where you may, for a time, seem to have little, the Lord will use such times to teach you of the marvelous treasures of heaven. They are all yours, for the sake of Jesus.

The Lord comes; prepare the way. We hear His Law and confess our sin; we repent and trust in His Word of grace. Therefore, we are confident that when the Lord comes to be present among us, He comes to be merciful. We cast our cares upon Him, trusting in His mercy, for we hear Him declare these merciful words: "Your iniquity is pardoned, your warfare is over, and you are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Amen