

Scripture: Matthew 3:1-17.

Theme: Christ's Messenger.

Text: Mt. 3:3b ... "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

Proposition: The Christian Church is the messenger of Christ, and deserves our best support in prayer, service, gifts and attendance.

Date Written: December 5, 1958.

Dates and Places Preached:

Dec. 7, 1958, Sheridan, Wyo., 9:30 + 11:00 a.m.

Dec. 13, 1964, Montrose, Colo., 8:30 + 11:00 a.m.

Introduction:

1. One of the traditional ways of observing the Advent (pre-Christmas) season in some churches is to point out the function of John the Baptist in preparing the way of the coming of Christ. ~~(This emphasis usually is given on the last Sunday before Christmas.)~~

2. The Scripture ~~form~~ today, which we have read already, gives the gospel writer's recollection of John's relationship to Jesus in helping Jesus get started in his mission. It tells how John came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." The writer notes that hundreds of years previously Isaiah had prophesied that one would "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." The Scripture records some of John's preaching to the Jewish leaders as to their need for repentance. It tells that John baptised with (not in, my Baptist friends) water, and that he told the Jews that the chosen one would baptise with the Holy Spirit. The writer relates that Jesus was baptised by John in his usual manner, and that at the end of the ceremony Jesus "saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him," and heard a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." From this experience onward, Matthew tells the story of Jesus. To that time John ~~has~~ been his messenger, and continued to be so until executed for telling the powerful of their sins, but Jesus follows his messenger into the hearts and minds of men.

3. The word "messenger," as used ~~of~~ John the Baptist in relation to Christ, would indicate one who tells the significance and importance of Christ, as one who moves people to seeking out a personal acquaintance with Christ. The messenger is important, is necessary, but never replaces the Lord's Son, the Christ.

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4. On this anniversary Sunday in which we celebrate the founding of our church many years ago we would think of the church as serving the same function for Christ as did John the Baptist. As to John the Baptist in his time, so to the church in our time is committed the charge, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." We spend our time here thinking of the church as Christ's messenger. We think of the entire Christian church, Protestant or Catholic, so long as it helps men know and accept Christ. We think of our local church as it functions locally in its capacity as a messenger of Christ, as do other local churches. Our church is Christ's messenger. Let us think of it in this sense today.

I. The church's call to conversion is in keeping with its role as Christ's messenger.

Rev. Lynderman Wright Monkise
1. When Dr. Rader came to Sheridan in August, 1888, he immediately sought out a place where he could preach. If his message was at all the typical one of that day, he preached challengingly to people to repent of their sins and accept Christ as their Saviour and Lord. This must have been his message, for the records tell us that he was requested by the congregation to send a minister here. Such a call to conversion, to a change of life based upon faith in Christ, evidently was the chief substance of the message of the other early preachers of this church. Their call was heeded by many, just as in an earlier day that of John the Baptist had been heeded, and the church grew so fast that in less than 6 years after the construction of the original building it was necessary to add to it. 210
was enrolled in Sunday School.

2. From conversation with members of our present congregation who remember well the minister who initiated the fund drive for the present building, the emphasis in the World War I period also was on repentance, conversion and a new life based on faith in Christ.

4. One of our members, recalling those days, said quietly and matter-of-factly, "I was converted under the preaching of Rev. Kingsly!"

3. Since that day your church has had some ministers of the so-called liberal outlook. Their emphasis may not have been so much on the need to be washed clean in Christ's blood, or to being converted, but their call to ~~lovingxxx~~ doing good to ones fellow man rests on the same foundation: on faith in Christ which motivates our love for our fellowman.

4. However you look at it, over the years, and still, the church's message is a call to a new and better way of life. The hope of eternity is based on the acceptance in this life, ~~in love and gratitude~~, of the eternal gift. If a person is to be fit to live in the presence of God, he must begin now by changing from selfish to loving attitudes, and Christ is the basis for such a conversion.

5. However it may put ^{be} ~~it~~ in doctrine or theory, the church's call always must be to conversion, to a change to the better, to the acceptance of God's forgiveness, to the faith in a blessed eternity. "Christ is the way." "Believe on Him and Thou Shalt be Saved." Such has been, such must always be, the church's message. It is Christ's Messenger in a way that no other organization can be. It is a necessary messenger.

II. The church's insistence on a more righteous social order is a rightful function of Christ's messenger.

1. We mentioned that some of your ministers perhaps have been of an outlook that might be termed "liberal." It is not fair to put labels on men, such as "fundamentalist," or "modern," or "liberal," if to label means to divide and condemn. To help understand various emphases of thought, however, it seems

to me all right to suggest that a person's spoken views seem to fit into this or that category of thought. It is with respect for them, whom I consider fine men, good ministers, and personal friends, that I suggest that Rev. Nowlen, Rev. Keegan, and Rev. Wilson perhaps might be termed "liberals." What do we mean by this? Perhaps, I, too, must be classed with these fine men, for I endorse their view that our Christian faith must make an impact on the society around us. Not just as individuals, each working as a Christian alone in his own little slot in life, but also as organized individuals and groups, throwing our collective weight on the side of better physical conditions for all God's children. Such is the emphasis of the so-called social gospel, and it is a righteous emphasis, I believe.

2. At the end of World War I the churches had become so convinced that the use of alcoholic beverages was wrong that they mustered enough organized effort to write as an amendment to our national constitution a ban on the sale and use of alcoholic beverages. The disputed history of prohibition is known to us. We have heard that it created a fine environment for gangsterism, that it made drinking popular for women, too; that it made law-breakers of good citizens, and so on. The reasoning behind the prohibition law is still a painful and growing truth, however, that alcoholism is a terrible, ungodly, social blight. Perhaps prohibition isn't the answer, but as Christians concerned with the physical, moral, and spiritual welfare of all people, we can not ignore the alcohol problem. ~~Next Sunday we will look at this problem in more detail.~~ The church, as Christ's messenger, must work with such problems, to enable more and more people to know the Christ who brings strength and help.

3. War, adultery, corrupt government,

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suppression of basic human freedoms, hunger, racial discrimination, and other wrongs, must always be matters of concern to the church. If this is to be liberal, to be a social gospel approach, then we declare such terms to be gloriously in keeping with the example and teaching and spirit of him for whom the Church is the messenger.

4. Our church here has a good record in the matter of showing interest in community, state, national, and international matters of social concern. Let us not rest on our laureals. Let us give our time and money to even a greater degree that all men might share the blessings God intends for them.

III. The church can function as Christ's messenger only if its members support it faithfully in accordance with their membership vow.

1. The founders and Pioneer~~x~~ members of this church certainly did support the church with generosity. They built for the future, as well as for themselves and their day. ~~Even now, the building is adequate for a membership larger than today's, and there are presently more members than ever before. Thro~~ the depression years a debt was discouraging, and frequently threatened the loss of the building to the congregation. Yet, always something was done, by way of fund-raising and giving, and eventually the debt was paid. ~~With this unpleasant background the reaction of many of the Pioneer members is certainly understandable and reasonable, that the church must stay on a cash basis from here on, and pay its way. This was gotten away from some-what when the remodelling of the old gymnasium took place, and there is still a slight debt thereon.~~ A strong leader in one of our Wyoming churches told the minister of another that the only way to build a church was to have the money cash-in-hand. The minister~~x~~ exclaimed, "Man, you don't know what you're talking about. In the ten years you've been talking

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about building in your church, and raised very little money to do it, our church built with credit a \$175,000 church and a \$15,000 parsonage, paid them off, and is going to start rightaway building a large educational plant, again with the faith that we can pay off that debt." We are not arguing here in favor of indebtedness, but we are saying that a vision, a goal, a faith in the future did characterize this church when the present building was erected. We are saying that such a spirit must be revived and must continue, if the church is to do the things it must as the messenger of Christ.

2. Our church needs more than one minister. It could use full-time secretarial help. - It should have ~~children's~~ and youth choirs. ~~It needs double the Sunday School teaching staff.~~ There are needs for physical improvements to make the building even more attractive and serviceable. We need to lift our vision on missions, doing even more than we are for the world-wide conversion to Christ. In an age when we all live better than ever, when luxuries are considered necessities, when prices keep going up but so does income, the Christian Church should lead in doing its work with adequate resources.

3. We don't need to go into the details of how. We can lift our vision and be the messenger of Christ. The plan has been before us for a long time. Each one of us subscribed to the plan when he took his membership vow to the church, when he said "I will," to the question, "Will you be loyal to the Methodist Church, and uphold it by your prayers, gifts, attendance and service?" The church doesn't depend on law, or tax-collectors, or the draft, to help its members demonstrate their loyalty, like that other agency to which we have pledged loyalty -- our government. ~~It~~ depends on your love of the church because it is a fellowship, a source of spiritual help, because it is Christ's messenger.

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Conclusion:

1. The Christian Church is the messenger of Christ, and deserves our best support in prayer, service, gifts and attendance.

2. Only on the grounds that this conviction is strong within the hearts of its members can be explained the growth and influence of a church such as the one ^{in which} ~~we~~ worship, ~~in and~~ honor this anniversary Sunday.

3. We present members, new and old alike, would in love and loyalty continue to give liberally of our time, talents and means that this church may continue to be Christ's messenger, winning men to Christ in true conversions, making our social order more pleasing in God's sight, giving of our best to the Master thro His church.

4. Thus we would continue, as Isaiah foretold and as was written of John the Baptist, to "prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

