

Sermon Title: **“For Peace: Prepare the Way”**

Bible: **Malachi 3:1-4 & Luke 3:1-6**

When: on the 2nd Sunday of Advent, December 8, 2024

Where: about 25 people (plus YouTube Live viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. Self Coup D’etat in South Korea

I was not able to calm down this week because of sudden and unbelievable news from South Korea. Last Tuesday, the current Korean leader, President Yoon, declared emergency martial law in order to try to occupy all the members of Congress with illegal military power. The majority of people in Congress, the Korean National Assembly, lifted it amazingly and peacefully with the help of ordinary citizens. It did not happen due to the threat of North Korea. It was due to greed and arrogance of the president. It was a self coup d’etat to protect the family of the current president and their regime. Thankfully, Mihyun, and my parents, my parents-in-law, and my fellow Korean people were safe. There was no bloodshed, but there was still fear and confusion, since Koreans had experienced many military coups in their history up until 1980, and military dictatorships up until 1987. Please remember South Korea in your prayers and thoughts.

Today is the 2nd Sunday of Advent, and its theme is Peace. We lit the second Advent

Candle for Peace. While reading today's scripture readings for peace, I remember the life of John the Baptist and reflect on the meaning of preparing the way of the Lord!

2. Prepare the Way?

John the Baptist was the messenger and the voice of one crying out in the wilderness in order to prepare the way of the Lord. First of all, John the Baptist was not hanging out in the temple or in the synagogue, but lived in the wilderness and spent time near the Jordan river. The word of God came to this John in the wilderness. This surprised many religious leaders of the temple and the synagogue at that time. To proclaim a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins challenged the religious system at that time! That's because at that time, people went to the temple with the sacrifice of offerings in order to be forgiven. To experience God's mercy and grace, do we have to give offerings, and do we have to come to the church? Does God meet us only if we give or only if we come to church? Are there any conditions for God's grace and love?

In our church history, there has been a 'doctrine' of: "There is no salvation outside of the Church." Is there no salvation outside of the Church? Does God exist only in the church? God's love and grace is unconditional, and God exists not only in the church but also everywhere, wherever we are in our daily lives and in our hearts. God's love and grace is so huge, wide, and deep that no one monopolizes it. Of course, we are the people of God; we are the body of Jesus Christ, but we are not THE church. We cannot be THE way. We are preparing the way! We just hope that when we love each other, we can experience God's

love, grace, and mercy through us, as a means of grace.

Second, the Gospel of Luke introduced John the Baptist within his political and religious context. John the Baptist prepared the way in the wilderness and in his own context. When John the Baptist was beheaded, the rulers of Herod and his brother Philip were mentioned. To make a long story short, John the Baptist spoke up against rulers in his own context, when he discovered the illegality of the rulers and leaders. That caused his arrest, imprisonment, and eventual execution. Did he need to be silent, because he was just a religious leader? Did he need to close his eyes and ears to any of the issues of political leaders? How about us? As Christians, do we need to be silent about any social issues? Do we need to just pray and not speak up against evil, injustice, and oppression? Do we need to just pray and do nothing for the betterment of our communities and society?

According to the life of John the Baptist, to prepare the way of the Lord impacts both individual and communal, and both personal piety and social justice. In other words, our faith journey is the combination of individual spiritual practice together with outward acts of compassion and advocacy for the marginalized, as our founder John Wesley emphasized.

3. Methodists and Women's Vote Right!

In our context, I would like to share one aspect of our Methodists' social action for women. In our California-Nevada Annual Conference, I learned that a total number of female pastors are more than that of male pastors. This is kind of our Methodist DNA. Our denomination founder John Wesley accepted women lay preachers and class leaders within his movements,

which began earlier in the 18th century. As you might know, some other denominations in the United States are still not welcoming female pastors. Some female candidates have transferred their church membership into the Methodist Church, according to their calling from God, not necessarily from the church, because some churches do not allow women to be pastors. The struggle for Women's rights is not only in the church but also in our community and society. Do you know when women in the United States could first vote? It was in 1920, when the 19th Amendment was ratified. This 19th Amendment granted women the right to vote. Behind the scenes, one Methodist woman, Phoebe Febb Burn, wrote a letter to her son, eastern Tennessee Representative Harry T. Burn. She wrote a very persuasive letter, which started with the words, "Dear Son, Hurrah, and vote for suffrage!" He had been planning to vote against the Amendment, but his mother's letter changed his mind at the last minute, and his one vote was the one that put the vote over the top! The Tennessee legislators voted for women's right to vote, and secured 36 states' approval to ratify the 19th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution. It was after more than 70 years of persistence through setbacks and sacrifice. During this time, there had been many of our Methodists, especially our Methodist women, fighting for this to happen. I learned one setback or reality after this. African American women were supposed to get the vote in 1920, but in reality, many states passed laws that often prevented it. So, African American women were granted the full right to vote in 1965 with the passage of the Voting Rights Act. Yes, we both pray AND act! And we pray and act both for our church and for our community. That's because God's kingdom is not

only for us, but also all the people!

4. For Peace: Prepare the Way!

Preparing the way of the Lord is not easy. Not everyone welcomes the way of the Lord. Not everyone welcomes God's kingdom. It took more than 70 years to guarantee women's right to vote. But no one questions American women's right to vote now! Unfortunately, sometimes we meet some people who are surprised at the existence of female pastors. How long will it take for all the churches to welcome female pastors? And as I shared at the beginning, it is not easy to build a peaceful and nonviolent democracy. I hope that there will be no more bloodshed and sacrifice in Korea. Preparing the way is not easy. It takes time, struggles, and sometimes sacrifices. It is our calling to prepare the way of the Lord for Peace. We do not need to put ourselves in danger, but we are people of justice and peace. When we hear the voice of preparing the way of the Lord, let us pray and act. Let us act and pray!

Closing Prayer

Loving and living God, as John the Baptist cried out in the wilderness, we prepare your way to the Kingdom of God. We know that it is not easy. But your voice is in us, because we are people of love and justice. Please be with us when we prepare your way for peace to all the people! In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.