

**Sermon**  
**7 December 2014**  
**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

**By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald**

**Text: Mark 1:1-8**

**Holy Communion**

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Today is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent. Advent is the time we use to prepare ourselves to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ – our Saviour and Lord.

So – how do *you* prepare yourself for Christmas?

- By making an extensive list of people you have to buy gifts for?
- By going to the shops well before Christmas so you have time to go back again, just in case you forgot something, or couldn't get it just right the first time?
- And then as soon as you are done with that, start wrapping your gifts, writing your cards, decorating your tree?
- And then, of course, plan your Christmas dinner?

Does that sound vaguely familiar? There is nothing wrong with being well organised for Christmas, but there are lots of things wrong if you think that you are ready for Christmas if you can tick all those boxes, and that's it.

Because Christmas is about *more* than that. And you all know that, otherwise you wouldn't have been here in church this morning. Coming

to church during advent is another way in which we can prepare ourselves for Christmas.

But that in itself is not enough either. We need to come to church, go home changed, and then go change the things that need change around us.

I once heard this fable of geese on a farm. The geese were all very happy to live on the farm, and every week they gathered to talk about how good it was to have such a safe home at the farm. And then they would talk about everything they were able to do, like flying away whenever they wanted to. But they would always conclude their meetings with the understanding that although they *could* fly away, they are better off staying on the farm, where they have shelter in bad weather and where they won't get shot at – in other words, where they were safe. Little did they know that all this time the farmer was fattening them for the dinner table...

No use coming to church and talking about all the things we as Christians *can* do, but then never doing any of them. If we walk out these doors and just blend in with the rest of the frantic Christmas shoppers outside, we are no different from those geese. God gave us wings – let's use it to fly!

John the Baptist wasn't one for cosying up at the farm – he was a doer. He broke away from the crowds and went to the wilderness, where he told the people to repent, because someone amazing was coming.

To do something like that in the 1<sup>st</sup> century was almost unheard of. Because outside the city walls you were not safe. The wilderness was viewed as outside the control of structured society. By going there, John symbolically withdrew himself from the established social system.

He didn't want his life to be just the same as everybody else's – he wanted his life to be *right*. He knew that God had a job for him, and he was going to do this as best he could. Without conforming, without worrying about what other people would think or say.

And you know what? It worked! Because crowds of people followed him out into the wilderness and listened to what he was saying about Jesus.

And what did he say? He said: "Repent!"

Now what does that mean exactly?

I don't know if any of you ever use a satnav in your car, but and incomer like me depend on my satnav to not get lost if I am driving somewhere!

Although the satnav is a wonderful tool, sometimes it can drive me up the wall! Do you know what probably annoys me most about the satnav? It's when I think I am doing exactly as it tells me, and then it says: "Make a U-turn. When possible, make a U-turn." And then of course, this voice doesn't stop until I make a U-turn! So, the sooner I do it the better, not only to stop the satnav from nagging in my ears, but also because if I need to make a U-turn, that means I am going in the wrong direction. And the longer I follow that road, the more of my own time I am wasting...

And that is exactly what John the Baptist said: “Repent. Make a U-turn.”

He said: Look at your lives! Do you know where you are heading? Are you going in the right direction, or are you just following the crowds?

Because if you are, you are wasting your time. Make a U-turn.

Something amazing is about to happen. The Saviour of the world is going to be born, but if you don't take care where you are going with your life, you might just miss it. *Make a U-turn.*

In a few minutes we are going to celebrate Holy Communion. Another way in which we can prepare ourselves for the celebration of the birth of Jesus – because he was born to save us.

Let's do a little introspection today when we eat the bread and drink the wine, and if what we see inside us doesn't look right, let's decide here and now to make a U-turn. To repent. And to start going in the right direction.

Because if we do *that*, we will truly be preparing ourselves for Christmas.

Amen