

“Time Out! . . . to Prepare”—Luke 1:16-17

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Time Out! . . . to Prepare”, is Luke 1:16-17 → *He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

“Time out!” You may have heard this phrase used in different situations for different reasons. Coaches sometimes call a “time out” in order to plan strategy during a sports game. Parents sometimes call a “time out” by placing their child into “time out” as punishment for misbehavior. Sometimes people call a “time out” during meetings when things start to seem a bit confusing and they need a break. All of these “time out” situations have one thing in common: People intentionally take some time to reflect on the situation at hand and make preparations to act in a specific manner as they fulfill the vocations of their lives. The words “time out” are usually used for the specific purpose of **getting us to stop, listen and learn something.**

Our congregation traditionally provides opportunities for “time out” before the celebration of Christmas to reflect on our lives and prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus. You have chosen to take time out of your activities to be here tonight to prepare your hearts to meet Jesus when He comes again on the Last Day by meeting Jesus as He comes to you in His Word and sacrament now! This “time out” is described by Yahweh when He commands us in Psalm 46:10 → *Be still, and know that I am God.*

God called “time outs” throughout history to prepare people for the coming of His Son to save the world from sin. Many times God sent His messengers such as prophets, angels and other leaders to His people to call a “time out.” The LORD’s “time outs” served the purpose of preparing for Him to act with His salvation in His peoples’ lives. Sometimes this involved a disciplinary “time out” because of their sin and rebellion, pronouncing impending judgment upon them as Yahweh proclaimed in the words of the prophet Amos: *Because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!* (cf. Amos 4:12) Such a disciplinary “time out” with His judgment was intended to bring them to repent of their sin and turn back to God.

In our text we hear another account of God calling a “time out” to prepare people for the coming of Jesus, His promised Savior from sin. We are introduced to a man name Zechariah. Zechariah served in the vocation of a

priest who regularly performed his duties of serving at the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem. On this particular occasion his duties involved burning incense before the altar of Yahweh. The Bible says he could not function in the vocation of a father since his wife Elizabeth was unable to have children. Zechariah got a “time out” call from God while fulfilling in his vocation as priest to prepare him for fulfilling the vocation of father! (cf. Luke 1:8-15)

An angel who appeared to him told him about the special vocation his son would fulfill. According to verse 17 of our text his son would *go before Jesus in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared*. Zechariah’s son was the one referred to in the Scriptures as John the Baptizer, the forerunner of Jesus. He would be the last of the Old Testament prophets going on the LORD’S behalf to prepare people to meet Jesus.

This “preparation” is one which takes place primarily in the heart. The heart is pictured in Scripture (and even in the world’s ways of thinking) as the place from which flows all devotions, thoughts, words and actions. We are told in Genesis of the LORD’S recognition *that every intention of the thoughts of man’s heart was only evil continually* (cf. Genesis 6:5) and that *the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth*. (cf. Genesis 8:21) Since it is sinful, from it also flows

rebellion, idolatry and every sort of evil. (cf. Matthew 15:19)

This is why the LORD is constantly focused on your heart. According to His promise in Ezekiel 36:26 He needs to *give you a new heart, and a new spirit*, by removing *the heart of stone* and giving you *a heart of flesh*, sensitive to His Holy Spirit's guidance to obey His commands. When you fail to obey God's commands the disciplinary "time out" is in order. Therefore, repent and believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

Your heart filled with sorrow over your sins before Yahweh (it's called "contrition") is actually His dwelling place, according to Isaiah 57:15 → *Thus says the One Who is high and lifted up, Who inhabits eternity, Whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, **and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.*** He removes the obstacles of sin in your heart and life through repentance and faith in Jesus! When your heart is cleansed of sin it is "turned" with a new love and actions toward those around you!

Thus, as John the Baptizer went about preaching repentance and faith in Jesus he actually called a "time out" for people to stop, listen to the LORD speak and look at Jesus! Verse 16 of our text describes this: *He will turn many of the children of Israel **to the Lord their God.*** He called people's attention to Jesus, Who was Immanuel—God with us in the flesh. (cf. Matthew 1:23) He

pointed people to Jesus, *the Lamb **of God**, Who takes away the sin of the world!* (cf. John 1:29) Acts 19:4 says that *John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the One Who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.* In other words, John made *ready for the Lord a people prepared* by bringing them to **God's preparations for them** in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ!

When we take “time out” with the LORD through His Word and sacrament we discover the importance of His preparations for us in Christ! This is the essence of the season of Advent. Advent’s message has two elements. The first is somber, reflected in its message of repentance: “Prepare to meet your Maker by repenting of your sins and believing in Jesus!” However, its joyful side is reflected in its message of grace: “Prepare to receive God’s gift—the forgiveness of your sins and eternal life in Himself made flesh in Jesus!”

“Time Out! . . . to Prepare” could be the mantra of any person preparing for the celebration of Christmas as a commercial holiday. It usually involves hectic planning, preparation and activity coupled with excitement and high energy. It means taking “time out” for hectic running around to find presents, mail packages, attend special programs and parties and so forth. But Advent’s preparation for the celebration of Jesus’ birthday means time out with quiet moments to prepare our hearts for the worship of the newborn King!

Preparations for the celebration of Christmas may be a dreaded burden for many with high emotional expectations that are seldom met. Advent's preparation is God's work, His "time out" for cleansing your mind, setting your heart at peace and fulfilling God's preparations for your life in Christ so that you can live for Him now and forever with Him in eternity! Amen.

Let's turn to page 192 of our hymnal and sing together the Offertory as a prayer a prayer of preparation:

**C** Cre - ate in me a clean heart, O God, and re -  
 new a right spir - it with - in me. Cast me not a -  
 way from Thy pres - ence, and take not Thy Ho - ly Spir - it  
 from me. Re - store un - to me the joy of Thy sal - va -  
 tion, and up - hold me with Thy free spir - it. A - men.

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