

**As We Come to the Table, the Holy Spirit Is *Already* at Work in Us, to Purge, Heal and Cleanse**

"The conventional wisdom" in the day of John the Baptist "said that there were three states of misery: sickness, fasting and travel," the Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander said in his sermon Sunday. "If and when persons found it necessary to travel, . . . before they departed on their journey, they would pay off their debts, provide for their dependents, and return things they had borrowed.

"There were, however, a few select roads in ancient Palestine that were actually surfaced," he continued. "These roads were roads built by the king, for the king. . . . Because they were built exclusively for the king's travel, they were called, 'The King's Highway.' . . .

"As John appears on the scene, it has been 400 years since God's people last heard God's voice through the prophet Malachi. . . . Four hundred plus years is a long time—long enough for roads, even miserable roads, to fall into a state of disrepair, long enough for hope to wane, . . . long enough for those who hope to wonder whether (in the words of C.S. Lewis) 'it will always be winter, and never Christmas.'

"Into this abyss comes John, with a message so timely and powerful that it reverberates through history to this day. John says, 'The King is coming. Prepare the way. Make the path straight. Fix up the highway.' The theological term for what John calls people to do is *repent* . . . 'to turn' . . . away from something and . . . toward something else.

"Biblical repentance is as much about outward action as it is about inward feeling. It is not just being sorry you are on the wrong path; it is exiting from that path and taking the opposite path. Biblical repentance is a change of heart and mind so thorough that it changes one's whole life. . . .

"And like John's first hearers, we also may be tempted to try to escape the call to repent. After all, we're believers. We're Christians. . . . Surely this call to a change of heart and a change of life is for 'others' out there, right? Of what could we possibly need to repent? . . . (S)ee if any of these may be the voice of the Spirit speaking to us this morning: I could repent of' pride, ("the illusion that I am in charge of my own life"); fear (of disease, disability, death, the future, of being in need, of others); unresolved anger; regret; complacency and apathy ("those deadly toxins that allow me to praise the baby Jesus while forgetting the crucified Christ"); self-righteousness ("thinking that I have [p.2→]



"Stir up Sunday" will be this Sunday, the third Sunday of Advent, so named because the Collect for this Sunday begins, "Stip up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us." "Stir up Sunday" has traditionally served as a reminder that it is time for members of the family to take turns stirring the Christmas pudding in preparation for the Christmas feast. The third Sunday of Advent is more theologically known as *Gaudet Sunday*, meaning "Rejoice!" Our gradual hymn, *Hark! The Glad Sound!*, will particularly follow the day's theme of anticipatory rejoicing. The rose candle in the Advent wreath symbolizes joy, and is lit on the third Sunday of Advent.

**Editor:** Box 972, Boise, ID 83701, 208-336-3951, harbingermail@aol.com

**Pastor:** The Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander, epworthrector@msn.com

**On the Web:** [www.epworthchapelonthegreen.org](http://www.epworthchapelonthegreen.org)

Sundays	10:00 a.m.: Word & Table service	<b>Soup supper 6 p.m. tonight, then Hanging of the Greens</b>
	11:30 a.m.: Refreshments, conversation	
	11:45 a.m.: Post-service discussion	

**6:00 p.m.: This Sunday: Candlelight Lessons and Carols**

**Tuesdays and Thursdays during Advent, 6:30 p.m.: Evening Prayers**

**For the poor: Christmas needs:** Hams, ready-to-serve rolls, butter or margarine, frozen pies, cake mixes, breakfast/brunch foods, eggs, muffins, pancake mix, sausage.

**Readings, 12/16, 10 a.m.:** Is. 35:1-10; Ps. 146; James 5:7-10; Mt. 11:2-11. **12/16 6 p.m., L&C:** Is. 40:1-8; Jer. 23:5-6; Is. 11:1-9; Micah 5:2-5; Zech. 9:9-10; Is. 35:1-10; Is. 7:10-15; Jer. 31:31-34; Luke 1:26-38. **12/23:** Is. 7:10-17; Ps. 24:1-7; Rom. 1:1-7; Mt. 1:18-25.

**Prayer Emphases:** Lithuania; Independent Baptist Churches; Park Street Congregational Church, Boston, and the Rev. Gordon Hugenberger; Jews for Jesus; parishioners on Winstead Place.

(**Sermon, cont'd.**) no room for change or growth" or "the desire to 'fix' others"; lack of hope ("the way things are is the way they are always going to be"). "If we listen closely and carefully this morning, we can still hear that voice calling to us from long ago. As we come to the Table, He invites us to open our hearts, for the healing presence of the Holy Spirit is *already* at work, . . . purging away all that is not God's will for us. He invites us to hope, for in Jesus our healing and cleansing have *already* begun."