**Blain Bargo’s Message Notes from 12/4/2022
Slow Down, Pay Attention**

Passage: Mark 1:1-11

We are beginning a four-week series for our Advent season that thoughts will be taken from a book titled “Awaiting The Already” written by Magrey deVega. It is an Advent Journey Through the Gospels, and today we will be looking at the Gospel of Mark, the first chapter in this book that is titled, Slow Down, Pay Attention.

 When I first saw the title, what ran through my mind was a parent teaching their teenager the life of driving on busy streets. I can visualize I think from experience sitting beside my kids trying to not be too nervous as they maneuvered through some of the busy streets where I live, and with my foot pressing through the floorboard trying to press on a brake peddle that was on the other side, anxiously telling them to slow down, and pay attention.

Then as I read through the start of this chapter that explained how Mark wrote about the coming of Jesus, my mind went to a recent football game. I believe the game occurred two weeks ago between the Jets and the Patriots. The whole game was a back and forth with no scoring. With just a few seconds left, it appeared the game was going into overtime at a score of 3 to 3. The Patriots were back to receive a punt and in the last seconds returned the punt for a touchdown. This is how I kind of saw Mark starting out writing about Jesus. He starts out preparing us for the arrival and boom!, all of a sudden Jesus’ ministry is starting. No infant, no childhood. Let’s look at our passage found in Mark 1. We are going to read through to verse 11 if you want to follow. Our power point will take us to verse 8.

Mark 1: 1-11

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.” “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.’ ” John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, “There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Mark is all about action. He takes immediately from what is written in the Prophets to introducing us to John the Baptist’s ministry of preparing the way for us to prepare for the ministry of Jesus. He isn’t waiting around to the end of the game to get things rolling. He is going for a touchdown right of the bat. Mark recognizes the importance of being prepared for Jesus when He calls us.

 As we journey together through the next several weeks of Advent, looking back in time and celebrating the birth of Jesus, we are reminded of His sacrifice that has given us access to be re-born, with His Spirit living with-in us so that we can outwardly share His grace and love.

 Mark is intentional in taking us on a fast forward journey right into the time of ministry of Jesus. He is intentional in wanting us to move away for just a time from the business of our daily lives and all the activities that the world has made us feel are so important, to a time of preparing ourselves to meet Jesus, to really meet Him.

 I shared with you a few weeks ago about one of my trips that I made for work and how I had decided to just turn the radio off during my trip and spend time praying, singing, and listening to God and Jesus. It’s not that the radio station I listen to doesn’t feed me as I listen to the message which is just about all Christian music, but this time was about slowing down, and paying attention. God’s presence was so real in my truck that morning. I have started to make this process a regular activity for portions of trips that I have to take. It has become a time for me in preparing to be with Jesus. It is a time that I am surrendering to Him, to understand His leading and to pray for help in my willingness to follow.

 John the Baptist’s message was straight forward. He is pleading with us to examine our hearts, our minds, and our deeds, to put them in alignment with the heart of God. We need to slow down, and pay attention, but we are not to be inactive. We need to learn that prioritizing our time from the business of our daily lives to preparing ourselves in relationship with Him is an active journey. It is so much more than just coming to worship on Sunday morning and fellowshipping with each other. It is worship on a daily basis and fellowship with God and Jesus on a personal level.

 Mark uses the word prepare twice in our text today. First in verse 2, “He will prepare a way for you”, and second in verse 3, “He will be the voice crying out in the wilderness to prepare the way for the Lord”. What I have learned is that both these instances when translated from their original Greek have different meaning. In verse 2, prepare is used in reference of making a building or a vessel or something, ready for use. So in verse 2 we are to be making ourselves ready to be a vessel for which God’s love and compassion can penetrate through into the world in which we live.

 The word prepare as found in verse 3 refers to getting ready for a future event. Get ready for something big to happen. Be in anticipation.

 Just as we celebrate Advent as the coming of the Christ Child, we are to be looking forward in anticipation for the Advent of His 2nd coming, when we will all meet Jesus in His glory.

 Last week we shared in the sacrament of communion. I like the way the author refers to this, “celebrate communion”. Quoting from his book, “When we break the bread and share the cup, we not only remember what Christ did, but we acknowledge that Christ is doing it again in the present.” “ Jesus is actually alive in our experience, a real presence in real time,” as we share this meal together.

 “Preparing for the coming of Jesus once again in our lives is to live out the presence of Christ among us, right here and right now. To await Jesus is to acknowledge the Jesus who is already in our midst, and to fully live into His life, death, and resurrection.”

 As we journey together through this Advent season, looking back in time at the birth of Jesus, may we also celebrate His presence with us now, and live in anticipation for His return. How do we heed the call of John the Baptist? How do we make straight our paths? We need to prepare our hearts and our minds, to be able to focus our eyes on what is ahead and not waiver to the left or right.

 I always like to close my messages with a challenge for us, for me, to grow into a deeper relationship with Jesus. Advent is a special time in the Christians’ year. It marks the beginning of our year, the beginning of a new cycle of journey together. We as a body are beginning a new journey in this church. As we begin this journey together, remember our past, live in the now, and look forward to the future, taking time to slow down and pay attention to the call of Christ in each of our lives and as a corporate body of the church.

 How can we impact the life of someone in this Advent season? How can the birth of Jesus and His sacrifice for us be made real today to those we meet throughout this season and beyond? Will you re-focus or re-structure your priorities to prepare for intimate time with Christ and allow Him to guide and minister to you this season? How will we be like John the Baptist and help to prepare the way for others to experience the love and grace of Christ? We are a light setting on a hill in this community to share the love of Christ. May we find ourselves in the hustle and bustle of this season able to slow down and pay attention to the activeness of sharing God’s love and preparing for His return.

Let us Pray: Father, thank you for your word this morning. As we journey through this Advent season we pray that we are being open in preparing for You, that we are examining our lives and making straight the path to be united with You. We pray that right here and now we recognize Your presence with-in our lives, with-in our church, and with-in our communities. Father we pray that we are open to being a vessel for You to use. Thank you for coming to us as a babe, for sacrificing yourself for each one of us, and for giving us a promise to live for as we look to the day of Your return.

Thank you Jesus, Amen.

Benediction
May you have the strength and courage to say “yes” to God and take joy in your new journeys wherever they may take you.

May your path lead straight, and always illuminated by the Light of Christ.

May you, yourself, be a reflection of that Light.

May the God and Jesus look with favor on you… and have mercy on you… and do great things for you.

May you become an instrument of Christ’s healing and reconciliation in the world around you.

May you be lifted up and filled to bursting with his grace and peace.

May you be blessed to overflowing as you share Christ’s love.

Amen