

If you want to be prepared for school and for life after school it's important to build a solid foundation in the three R's: **reading, writing, and arithmetic**. To help children learn the three R's well, learning centers continue to pop-up and flourish all over North America. While building a solid foundation in the three R's can prepare you for school there is another set of R's that prepares us for something much more important, **namely Christ's coming**.

**This morning John the Baptist pushes us to prepare for Christ with these three R's: *remorse, rearranging, and rejoicing*. YES, JOHN TELLS US "WHAT WE SHOULD DO" TO GET READY FOR JESUS' COMING.**

**There is no better person to prepare us for Christ than John the Baptist**, after all he had been sent for that very purpose. The first thing that John encourages us to do in PREPARING FOR CHRIST is to **show remorse over our sin**. **Remorse**: *or sincere sadness* was something lacking in many of the spiritual leaders of John's day. Many of them came out to be baptized by John, but John said to them, "**You brood of vipers!** Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" (Luke 3:7) John knew that the Pharisees and Sadducees weren't coming to be baptized because they were sorry for their sins. He knew instead that they wanted to be baptized because that was the thing to do if you were a religious person, and keeping up such appearances was a full-time job for these leaders.

No, these leaders didn't seriously think that they needed baptism because after all they were Abraham's children! Didn't that mean they had a free ticket to heaven? Weren't they God's chosen people?

**Some of us come to worship with that same attitude, don't we?** We come to church not because we want to hear God's word, but out of some sense of obligation to family or to tradition. In the process we may even trick ourselves into believing that heaven is ours by virtue of our church attendance. **If so, John has some strong words for us, "You brood of vipers!"** (Lk 3:7) Deceitful, just like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, that is what we are if we outwardly live the life of a believer without believing.

**But what does it exactly mean to show remorse over sin?** It doesn't mean to be sad that others are offended by our sins, or sad that we got caught. *That's regret, not remorse*. **To show remorse means to change our mind about sin.**

It means that we no longer view sin as something that is fun and exciting, or something which can't be helped and isn't that harmful any way. **It means that we see sin for what it is – something that damages our relationship with God and with others.** Sin is something that God hates so much that he once destroyed everyone in the world except for eight people with a flood. And sin will move God to destroy the world again – this time with fire. **How then should we view our sin? With serious sadness.** Therefore, when we all join in confessing our sins at the beginning of the service we should not just parrot the words printed out for us in the hymnal or bulletin, but make that confession a sincere confession. As you confess your sins think of how you have brought grief to your heavenly father by your actions, words, and thoughts. **Showing remorse over sin however, is only the first step in preparing for Christ.**

**THE NEXT STEP IS REARRANGING.** "**Produce fruits!**" That's what John told those who were coming out to be baptized by him. Don't just say you are sorry but show it in the way that you rearrange your life so that you don't fall into that sin again.

**How exactly should we rearrange our lives? WHAT SHOULD WE DO?** That depends. When the **tax collectors** asked John that question he told them that they should no longer take more money than they had been appointed to take. When **the soldiers** wanted to know how to rearrange their lives John told them not to use their positions to terrorize people or to extort money from them. He encouraged them instead to be content with their pay.

**What kind of advice would John give to you regarding the fruit of repentance? WHAT WOULD HE TELL YOU AND ME TO DO TODAY?** Well, if you are in sales he may tell you not to withhold the truth from your customers concerning a product they are planning to buy. If you get paid by the hour John would have encouraged you not to punch and then sit around and talk for 20 or 30 minutes before working. If you are a student he would have told you not to cheat, but to respect your teachers and classmates. **Saying that we are sorry for our sin but refusing to rearrange our life to avoid that sin shows that we really haven't repented and the Apostle John tells us that such a person has no part in Christ.**

1<sup>st</sup> John says... "**The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him... Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did... No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.**" John the Baptist put it this way in our text in vs. 8, "**The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and**

***thrown into the fire.” SO, WHAT SHOULD WE DO? “REARRANGE OUR LIVES –AND PRODUCE FRUITS WORTHY OF GOD.***

A PASTOR ONCE SHARED THIS STORY ABOUT CHANGE: When I was a child, my minister father brought home a 12-year-old boy named Roger, whose parents had died from a drug overdose.

There was no one to care for Roger, so my folks decided they’d just raise him as if he were one of their own. At first it was quite difficult for Roger to adjust to his new home—an environment free of heroine-addicted adults! Every day, several times a day, I heard my parents saying to Roger:

"No, no. That’s not how we behave in this family." "No, no. You don’t have to scream or fight or hurt other people to get what you want."

"No, no, Roger, we expect you to show respect in this family."

**And in time Roger began to change.**

Now, did Roger have to make all those changes in order to become a part of the family?

**No. He was made a part of the family simply by the grace of my father.**

But did he then have to do a lot of hard work because he was in the family?

You bet he did.

It was tough for him to change, and he had to work at it.

But he was motivated by gratitude for the incredible love he had received.

Do you have a lot of hard work to do now that the Spirit has adopted you into God’s family?

Certainly. But not in order to become a son or a daughter of the heavenly Father.

No, you make those changes because you are a son or daughter.

And every time you start to revert back to the old addictions to sin, **the Holy Spirit will say to you, "No, no. That’s not how we act in this family."**

**Thinking about the true meaning of repentance is especially important today** as many of us today, are planning on coming forward to receive the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. In preparing to receive the Lord’s Supper Paul reminds us that it is important that we not only acknowledge that we are sinners but also *plan on rearranging our sinful life.* If we come forward to receive the sacrament even though we are planning on committing a sin this afternoon we only make a mockery of the forgiveness that is offered, and eat of this gift of Jesus for “no gain.” **Yes, often there is NO benefit.** **Therefore, brothers and sisters, heed John’s words and prepare for Christ through REMORSE and REARRANGING.**

**So far, we’ve taken a look at two of the three R’s that prepare us for Christ** but if we would stop with remorse and rearranging we would be no better off than the other religions of this world. Every religion tries to get people to feel sorry for the wrong they have done, and encourages them to make the world a better place in which to live.

**But remorse and rearranging cannot bring us salvation.** We can try and try to get rid of sin but we will always fall back into it. Therefore, what hope is there for us who want to stand before a God who demands perfection? Even John, whom Jesus called the greatest man (Matt. 11:11), knew that he was unworthy to stand in God’s presence. When the people began to wonder whether or not John was the promised Messiah he told them that he wasn’t even worthy to untie the Messiah’s sandals (Lk. 3:16).

**While none of us deserves to stand in God’s presence, Jesus, the Messiah came to save us from our sins making it possible to stand before him.** *You see, when John encouraged us to produce fruits worthy of repentance he was not telling us to produce fruits worthy of forgiveness.*

\*\*Nothing we do can ever earn God’s forgiveness. **God does not forgive because we are sorry for our sins; he forgives because Jesus died for us.** Seeking to rearrange our life so that we don’t fall into sin then is simply a joyful, God-made response to that forgiveness.

**SO, WHAT IS THE 3<sup>RD</sup> –R- THAT PREPARES US FOR CHRIST? “REJOICING…” Rejoicing at the forgiveness that Jesus won for us.** *{You see, while God does want us to feel sorry for the sins that we commit he doesn’t want us to fall into despair over them. He wants us to know and believe that he has provided a solution. In fact, if we think that God could never forgive us for what we have done we are saying that Jesus really didn’t do enough to win forgiveness for all people. To say that is to call God a liar and to take glory and honor away from Christ. }*

**Jesus has not only won forgiveness, he has promised to give us the gift of the Holy Spirit. John said that while he baptized with water Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire** (Lk. 3:16). This was not a reference to a baptism different than John's. Paul tells us that just as there is one Lord, there is one baptism (Eph. 4:5). John instead was referring to the day of Pentecost when Jesus would visibly pour out the Holy Spirit on his apostles. Lest we think that we have missed out on that gift, the Bible promises that this same Holy Spirit is poured out on all those who are baptized with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, 39). And anyone who believes in Jesus can be certain that he has the gift of the Holy Spirit because we can only make such a confession if the Holy Spirit has created faith in our heart (1 Cor. 12:3).

**WHAT SHOULD WE DO TO READY OURSELVES? How then should we prepare for Christ? With great REJOICING because he is our Savior from sin. WITH GREAT "REJOICING" BECAUSE THROUGH CHRIST GOD HAS FORGIVEN US ALL OUR SINS.**

In his book, What's So Amazing About Grace, Phillip Yancey tells the story of Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway grew up in a very devout evangelical family, and yet there *he never experienced the grace of Christ*. He lived an un-moral life where there was no father, no parent waiting for him and he sank into the mire of a graceless depression. A short story he wrote perhaps reveals the grace that he hoped for. It is the story of a Spanish father who decided to reconcile with his son who had run away to Madrid. The father, in a moment of remorse, takes out this ad in El Libro, a newspaper. "Paco, meet me at Hotel Montana, Noon, Tuesday... All is forgiven... Papa." When the father arrived at the square in hopes of meeting his son, he found eight hundred Pecos waiting to be reunited with their father. Was Paco such a popular name? Or is a father's forgiveness the ease for every soul?

**SO, WHAT SHOULD WE DO?** While parents continue to spend lots of money to ensure that their children are **well grounded in reading, writing, and arithmetic** nothing can be more important FOR EACH OF US than being **well-grounded in the spiritual R's: remorse, rearranging, and rejoicing**.

**So, confess your sins daily AND REMEMBER THAT JESUS FORGIVES YOU.**

AND MAY THAT KNOWLEDGE HELP YOU TO "REARRANGE" YOUR LIFE SO THAT LITTLE BY LITTLE YOU CAN BECOME MORE AND MORE LIKE HIM—THE ONE WHO GAVE HIS LIFE TO SAVE YOU.

Amen.