



I did most of my growing up in Los Angeles. A very special memory is of the many evenings spent at the Hollywood Bowl. It is similar to Symphony on the Prairie held up at Connor Prairie near Noblesville.

The Hollywood Bowl sits in a natural amphitheater in, naturally enough, Hollywood, CA- not too far from the Hollywood signs which have just been rebuilt and which you may have seen on the news. The Bowl is the summer home to the Los Angeles Philharmonic and also hosts a variety of other concerts throughout late spring, summer and into the early fall. Classical, jazz, blues and many other types of music have a venue there. It is a place where those sitting in the “nosebleed” seats and those sitting in boxes eating elaborate meals, mingle to hear music under the stars.

Among those memories is that of a man, an older and somewhat battered man. He sits at the entrance to the Bowl, on a wooden crate, holding a puppet that he uses to emphasize his words. He is a street preacher. And the words he speaks echo those of John, the son of Zechariah. John, whom we also call John the Baptist or John the Baptizer.

Repent. Repent. Prepare ye the way. The Day of the Lord is coming. Make straight the path. Turn your life around. Repent.

It’s easy to dismiss that old man as a kook or a crackpot. It’s easy to walk on by and not listen. It probably was easy to think about John the Baptizer this way as well. After all, he lived in the wilderness. He ate locusts. He wasn’t part of normal, everyday society. He preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

But in order for you to qualify for the baptism John was offering, you had to repent of your sins. Hard enough for us to do in the best of times. After all, who among us wants to admit that we aren’t at least mostly perfect just the way we are? Who wants to admit that we need to change some things in our lives? As long as life is going along pretty well, we tend to dismiss deep self-examination. We tend to gloss over those things that we do, and those that we leave undone. It’s not that important we say. And, sometimes it’s true. Not everything we do is of earth-shattering importance.

What is of earth-shattering importance, at least for our lives and for our future, is that we do repent when we have strayed from the path that Jesus laid out for us. Repent of those

times when we have failed to love God with all our heart, with all our mind, and with all our soul. Repent of those times when we have failed to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Repent in the sense of the Greek word “metanoia.” Turn around. Take a new path. Be honest with ourselves and our God. Ask God to forgive our sins and commit ourselves to new life as a believer in Jesus the Christ, the only Son of God. Be transformed by the love which God, through Christ, offers to us.

Advent is a time of waiting. Of remembering that Mary, Joseph and the donkey are making their way from their home to Bethlehem. Of knowing we will arrive on Christmas morning at the manger with the baby Jesus. The day when God becomes human form living here on earth. God incarnate, God with us.

Advent is a time of watching. This week, two candles are lit in our Advent Wreath. More and more light is coming into the world. On Christmas Day, all four candles will be lit. We will have traveled, the four weeks of Advent, from darkness into light.

Advent is a time to be adventurous. To be courageous enough to look at our own lives and see where we need to repent. Where we need to turn around. Where we need to ask forgiveness for those things done, and those things left undone. To speak to those whom we have hurt to rebuild relationships. To mirror the love that God has offered us in our offer of love and support to those around us.

Repentance is tied directly to hope. Hope that new life is possible when we acknowledge our own sins and we accept the love that God has poured out for us, through the life, death and resurrection of His son, Jesus Christ.

In this season of Advent, when all around us the world is busy with holiday jingles and advertisements exhorting us to buy more and more, it is good to stop – or at least slow down. Take a deep breath. Take time to think about what this season truly means.

Take time to think about John’s message:

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

One of the trips I hope to take is to visit the Iona Community which is located near Scotland on a small island. The Iona Community is an ecumenical Christian community that was founded in 1938 by Rev. George MacLeod. It has become world-renowned as a special place. In addition to the worship services, spiritual direction and other offerings, Iona has also published a variety of worship resources. One of them is an affirmation of faith that speaks, I think, to this time of Advent:

We believe that God is present
In the darkness before dawn
In the waiting and uncertainty

Where fear and courage join hands
Conflict and caring link arms
And the sun rises over barbed wire.
We believe in a with-us God
Who sits down in our midst
To share our humanity.
We affirm a faith
That takes us beyond the safe place
Into action, into vulnerability
And into the streets.
We commit ourselves to work for change
And put ourselves on the line;
To bear responsibility, take risks
Love powerfully and face humiliation
To stand with those on the edge
To choose life
And be used by the spirit
For God's new community of hope.¹

May this Advent be one in which you are willing to take the risk of metanoia. May your life be transformed through the love of God, and may you, secure in that love, reach out to others and offer them yourself, a child of God. Peace and grace be to you, beloved of God. *Amen.*

¹ The Iona Community. *Iona Abbey Worship Book* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2001), 109.