Today we hear a voice crying out in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord!" (Isaiah 40:3b) John proclaims a baptism of repentance. What does this mean for us almost 2000 years later? Practically speaking, how can we prepare the way of the Lord? As a civil engineer, I am happy to report that the words from Isaiah that call for the leveling of every mountain and the filling in of every valley are metaphorical directives. Not only would an earth-moving project of this scale be impossible, the environmental ramifications would be disastrous. This metaphor refers to the elimination of things that stand between our God and us. These obstacles don't exist in the physical landscape; rather they are things that stand between God and us. They are the mountainous terrain of our overinflated egos and the deep valley of our false feelings of unworthiness. These are, in fact, two ways that we are
tempted into inaction, or to delay our spiritual journey of growth and maturity. For others, who have begun that journey, only to get lost in the wasteland of competing ideologies, we will have to re-chart a straight course on the highway to our God. In any case, it is about getting back to the basics of our faith. This is what it means to repent. "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand." (Matthew 3:3 & 4:17)

These words calling us to repentance, first by John and then by Jesus, tell us that the time for delay is over because Heaven is not in some distant future – in fact, the Kingdom is NOW! We also learn from John that God is not in some distant place. John declares God present when he says, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) Furthermore, we will hear from Jesus that the Kingdom of God is now, and the Kingdom of God is among us in his response to the Pharisees. "The coming of the kingdom of God cannot be observed, and no one will announce, 'look, here it is,' or, 'there it is.' For behold, the kingdom of God is among you." (Luke 17:20-21) So, given this, what are we called to do during Advent?

What can we do to repent of our old ways and prepare for the way of the Lord? First, we must see Jesus as a model for our lives. This means doing what Jesus did that caused John to declare the coming of the Holy Spirit. (Mark 1:8) Jesus foretold that we would do what he did and even greater. (John 14:12) The works of Jesus begin with affirming people’s potential and healing their brokenness – not reminding them that they are broken. Secondly, we need to be agents of reconciliation and to avoid making judgments. ("Stop judging, that you may not be judged." (Matthew 7:1)) Be gracious towards others even if they believe differently than us. Remember, Jesus did not make being Jewish a condition of his care and healing of those he encountered. For Jesus, it was more important to meet the actual needs of others, than in maintaining institutional beliefs and structures.

The overarching thrust of Jesus' ministry was peacemaking, which is something we are in dire need of today. He is declared the ‘Prince of Peace’ and the peace he brought about came as a result of his Father's love, a peace that he extends to everyone. There are some who believe that peace can be achieved by the exercise of power or through the destruction of our enemies, but Jesus never taught or exercised this kind of peacemaking. Quite the opposite, he preached the love of enemies. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust." (Matthew 5:43-45) In the end, one could surmise that Jesus was more about fostering the Kingdom in the present than a focus on some future afterlife. This seems consistent with His teaching, and it is how we can further the work of Jesus here on earth. Eternity is God work; we are called to do what we can in the present and by this "Prepare the way of the Lord."