‘*Prepare the way of the Lord’*– that is the key to the gospel this Sunday. ‘*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.*’

And to smuggle in a phrase I used last weekend, we continue to be reminded to ‘*make the main thing the main thing*’ – during Advent, we focus on the *main thing* – we focus on *Jesus,* making his paths straight into our lives and our hearts.

John the Baptist whom we hear about today is the voice of Advent. His message in today’s gospel is simple and direct: To make the Lord’s paths straight, “*He comes proclaiming a baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins.*” It was John’s job to be the forerunner of Christ as prophesied 600 years earlier by the prophet Isaiah he would be the one who would proclaim to the world that the promised Messiah was on his way, and what we must do to prepare for His coming.

The question emerges - *why is repentance so important*? Well, we have to remember what the coming of Christ signifies. It’s indeed a happy and joyous occasion, but it is *so much more* than that. God isn’t bound by time and exists outside of time as we know it – yet, he chose to enter into it – to enter into the realm of human history through His Son in order to redeem us from our sins. This is a *really big deal* which isn’t to be taken lightly. Our Creator loved us so much that He came into this world to defeat sin, to open the doors of heaven to all of us, and to give us an opportunity to have a direct relationship with Him. All of salvation history hinges on this moment, and for us to participate in the Father’s loving plan of redemption, it is up to us to prepare ourselves spiritually in order for Christ’s birth to really take root in our hearts.

The purpose of repentance isn’t to see us suffer, but rather it’s meant to help us put our spiritual lives back in order by bringing all of the messiness of our lives into the light by bringing it before Christ so that our Lord can *heal* us.

It’s a time to change our lives for the better. It’s time to prepare the way for the Lord. It’s time to focus on our inner life, and to make a conscious effort to remove ourselves from the noise of the world. In doing so, I think we will find like John the Baptist, that true freedom comes when we are able to rise above our burdens by working on that inner peace of soul that comes from a renewed focus on Christ.

In concentrating on our spiritual lives, we look at the mountains that need to bulldozed – all those things in our lives that distract us from going deeper with our Lord.

And it is also to look at filling in those valleys of our lives – all those things that we don’t concentrate enough on – perhaps our prayer lives, our charity, our families. We should look at balancing our lives by pushing the mountains of our lives into the valleys – to even things out so that we do prepare that straight path to the Lord – so that we can more easily make ‘*the main thing, the main thing*’.

Advent is a time of *hope*. Baruch in our 1st reading is offering his people a prophecy of hope. He writes at a time when the Jewish people were at their lowest point – they were in exile with no land, no freedom, no temple to worship in. ‘*God is leading Israel in joy in the light of his glory*’, a reminder that even at their lowest point, God has not forgotten about them – there are brighter days to come. And in Advent he reminds *us* of the same thing – in all the trials or sufferings that we are experiencing, our Lord has not forgotten us – *he calls us back to Him*.

Advent then is not just the waiting period for Christmas, nor the celebration of Christ’s birth in Bethlehem, but the time we give to allow Jesus back into our lives in a more deliberate way. The more open we are to His birth in us, the straighter and smoother our ways become. As we begin this second week of Advent, we should take some time to remember the message of John the Baptist who calls us to repentance – who calls us back to God - because he is the *true voice* of one crying out in the wilderness – he is the voice of Advent calling us to ‘prepare the way’, asking us to make the ‘*main thing the main thing*’.