

# Getting Straight

Mark 1:1-8

Advent 2 B 12-6-2020

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Ed was a writer living in Honolulu in 1941. On Sunday morning, December 7, he was playing tennis. He said it took all of them a while to realize that “the air show” across the harbor was for real. By evening he had volunteered for guard duty. Because he had a car he was pressed as a chauffeur, but soon was appointed a War Correspondent for United Press. At 67, Ed was the oldest accredited correspondent in the Pacific Theatre.

Once he wrote a poem that said in part:

"Is there a war that's worth the toll of blood and pain...

That's worth the tears and agony, the grief and hate?

Yes, such a war can surely be

If it but set or keep [us] free.

**Late in the war he was on a ship that was attacked by a kamikaze pilot. Fortunately for Ed and the ship, only the pilot died.**

**Ed said that kind of thing was hard on an old man.**

You probably know some of his writing. His name was Edgar Rice Burroughs, the creator of Tarzan, John Carter of Mars, and the Lost Worlds. *[Styléd after an episode of Paul Harvey, The Rest of the Story]*

**What was the lesson of Pearl Harbor? The price of freedom is eternal vigilance. In other words, “Be prepared”.**

**Advent says Be Prepared. Jesus is coming! Be ready! Be Prepared!**

The Gospel of Mark is a sermon on the suffering and death of Jesus but with an unusually long introduction.

The point of Mark: we can see God's plan from the hill of Golgotha. Its highest point is the crucified one.

The centurion at the cross: "Truly this is the Son of God." The manger and the cross is God's way to us.

**Wait, we're only at the beginning.**

This becomes clear when first we look at the thong of the sandal of Jesus -- & discover that his foot, the foot of a despised & rejected man is low, but we are so low that we have to reach up to untie the thong -- & we can't reach it by ourselves.

Today, I have a practical idea for you. Most of you have or have used a First Aid Kit at some time or other.

It's handy to have those supplies together, ready for use.

Make yourself a kit to prepare for Christ's coming: Two basic items to start with. First, a cross, to remind us of our sins and God's forgiveness. 2nd, a Bible, for instruction on wound care.

One of the reasons a first aid kit is valuable is that it is ready for use, and we learn how to use it at the appropriate times. This Christ kit is the same way. If you don't have the pieces, or don't use them, you won't be prepared.

**As we enter the chaos of the commercial Christmas season, remember the real costs of following that baby who will be born.**

It's become the winter festival of conspicuous consumption.

What does it say about our relationship to God? The giving of gifts is supposed to give us a joyous feeling. We do this to participate in God's giving to us. Yet, our cultural celebration of it centers on the spending of money, the obligation to give ever bigger, more expensive gifts, whether the receiver of the gift needs or wants the gift or not.

As stores, homes, churches, everyone, get ready for Christmas Day, December 25, it's so easy to forget that the baby whose birth we celebrate, is the baby who dies on the cross for our sins.

Mark shows Jesus as the Son of God, defining what following Jesus means and what life immersed in the Holy Spirit means. It all points to the cross. An ironic sign of victory or good news for God's anointed, the Son of God.

The cross of Christ is the central fact of life for a Christian.

### **Put a cross in your prep kit, & a Bible.**

Human beings have a basic distrust of what we don't understand. This goes to a reluctance to speak & act with trust. We need to look at the Bible as a whole: God's plan of salvation for humanity, To understand that plan.

*Looking at the Bible as a whole, it all comes into focus -- Mark doesn't come before Genesis, Hezekiah and Isaiah come together, but not Jeremiah and Abraham.*

The basic message of the Bible: God has a plan for getting the world and us straight: the gospel of his Son, Jesus Christ. quarrels, losses, griefs, puzzles, failures, problems, weaknesses, The chaos of living in a broken & troubled world is ordered if we only know the plan -- & turn from all other false & phony plans to his

We have the promise in Scripture, Jesus is near us, at all times. Jesus is with us. Despite the busy-ness, the pressure, and the assault on our senses that passes for Christmas, Jesus is near. But, if we don't read the Bible, we don't have that message.

Our bodies need about three quarts of water a day to operate efficiently.

Water helps break up and soften the food we need to live. Blood is 90% H<sub>2</sub>O, carries nutrients to the cells. Water regulates our body temperature, and provides lubrication for our joints and muscles. Without water's lubrication, joints and muscles grind and creak like unused parts of some old rusty machinery.

Just so, we need Scripture to live efficiently, & effectively, in response, in readiness to receive the Savior. Without contact with the Word of God, our lives would grind & creak just like that rusty machinery, because we can't operate without God, & the Bible gives us that connection.

We have to use the Bible, read the Word. That's how God speaks to us, teaches us to care for ourselves, heals our wounds, guides our lives. The Bible is our lifeline, and it is our preparation for what is to come. It's life-support.

### **Have a cross and a Bible in your prep kit, and USE it**

Being ready isn't a matter of standing around. John the Baptist told everyone: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" A way is prepared in the wilderness. And it gets the world straight and it gets us straight.

**Christmas is the coming together of the manger and the cross. Christ come as a man, come to die for us. And that lifts us up, makes our paths straight.**

We are called, to the cross, to the Savior. God has given us the Word, Scripture that provides a guide for our lives. God has given us the Word Incarnate, God made man, in the manger, and we are called to be prepared for the Coming.

And that means eternal vigilance, or vigilance for eternity.

Lord, keep us ever ready for your return, with reserves of faith in you, hope in your future, and love for your world, that we may say no to whatever makes it more difficult to say yes to you. 1192