

## Sermon Manuscript

**Grace and Peace to you from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

The address for today is based on the Gospel reading, Mark chapter 1 verses 1 to 8 which we heard read earlier.

**[B]** When Driving in South Australia's Riverland, you may be familiar with the fruit fly quarantine bins? **[P]** For those of you who do not know what I am talking about, when you travel into the Riverland, you are prohibited from taking with you any fruit or vegetables due to the potential risk of introducing fruit fly. The consequences of fruit fly being introduced into the agricultural sector are catastrophic. And to help protect this agricultural sector, **all** people must contribute towards keeping the industry safe by abiding by the fruit fly quarantine zones. Quarantine bins are present to allow safe disposal of any fruit and veg as you travel into the Riverland. And in the kilometers leading up to the quarantine bins, there are numerous signs which warn you of the upcoming quarantine zone. Signs like **[Exp]** 'Fruit Fly Free Zone, 5km ahead' or 'Deposit fruit at quarantine bin- 2km ahead'. **[P]** Now these signs have a dual purpose. Firstly, to inform you about the rules and Secondly to warn you what will happen if you don't follow them.

How do we know about this dual purpose? Because at the bottom of the sign it reads '\$5000 penalties applies for non-compliance.' **[Exp]** Including this penalty on the sign helps reaffirms what you're supposed to do so you can do the right thing, **and also** warn you about what will happen if you have thoughts of disobeying the law.

**[B]** John the Baptist's message in today's Gospel reading also has a dual purpose similar to the quarantine signs. John's message is a warning, but at the same time is also informative. As a warning, John is imploring us to turn from our evil ways of sin so that we can have a straight path for the coming Jesus. Sin has bent our lives, our paths out of shape and we are told to repent to re-construct the straight path.

**[P]** Repent from the times we have been quick to get angry. Repent when words have been used to hurt others. Repent when we have put our trust in other people or other gods rather than in the Triune God. These are just a few examples of sins which abound in human life. **[P]** Let's think back to the fruit fly signs parallel. The signs tell us what the right thing to do is and they encourage us to do it – to put our fruit into the bins! But the signs also warn us if we don't do this, penalties will apply. They both inform and they convict us. So too with John. John convicts us of our sins to encourage individual repentance. But John also informs us of the coming one.

Friends, **[P]** John the Baptist is preparing us for one who is so much greater than he is. John's purpose is both convicting us of our sin, but he's also pointing us to the one who is coming to bring good news and a new beginning with God. **[Exp]** John doesn't muck around here. He tells it straight! We are sinners. We are unworthy to be in God's Holy presence. He does this because there were people who generally thought they were OK in God's sight. **[Exp]** They mistakenly think they have done

enough to win favor in God's eyes. Thoughts like: Look at all the good deeds I have done in my life. **[HG]** I am not as bad as those people over there are. **[P]** Are you one of those people that John the Baptist is referring too? Do you think that you are perfectly able to stand before God in your own worthiness? Maybe you are a person who thinks that the fruit fly quarantine rules apply to everyone else, but not to you and that for some reason you are above the law. Friends, the truth can be hard to accept. But we are all sinners, we all fail and fall short. We all need to be forgiven and we all need to hear the next part of John's message to help understand the bigger picture.

**[B]** There's one key word to help us understand what John the Baptist is proclaiming and telling us to do. **[Exp]** Repentance! Generally, in everyday life we would understand repentance as 'being the action of sincere regret and remorse.' **But**, in Greek, repentance has a more defined meaning: a change of mind, a change in the inner person, a change deep inside of us. How much more powerful is verse 4 if we read it saying, "John the Baptist proclaimed a baptism of change deep inside of us, for the forgiveness of sins." **[P]** John is advising us to act and change our ways, not just be merely remorseful and regretful of our actions. True repentance comes from deep inside of us, a deep change of the heart and mind. An openness to receive God's free gift of forgiveness and healing which is completely undeserved. A gift which only God can give because we are unworthy to receive it through any of our own inner actions. **[Exp]** The Gift of Jesus Christ is God the Father's greatest gift, and John the Baptist is preparing us for his arrival.

John's message is informing us about something coming up- **Jesus**. Jesus who will baptize people with the Holy Spirit. A baptism which is very different to John's baptism. A baptism where Jesus unites us to himself and washes us all clean. Clothes us in righteousness. Forgives all our sins. A baptism which only needs to be done once, unlike John's baptism of repentance which needed to take place over and over again. This 'once for all' baptism from Jesus leads to us being able to rejoice in everlasting life after being set free from the power of death which our sins deserved. St Paul picks up on this point in Romans 6:4 'We were buried therefore with Jesus Christ by baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too may walk in newness of life.' **[P]** Through faith in his Son Jesus, God gives us everlasting life with grace and mercy, with the added bonus of our baptism receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit: something that John's baptism was not able to give.

**[B]** This Advent, as we await and prepare to celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour this Christmas, may we all be expectant and ready to receive this wonderful gift from God the Father. May God's free undeserved gift of grace, which is received through our own baptism, abundantly flow through our hearts. In our text, Mark records that all the people from Judea and Jerusalem came to hear John's message and to prepare themselves for the coming Messiah **[P]** **[Exp]** And what about you here today? Is John's message hitting home for you? What sort of

preparations and time are you going to set aside in your hearts to celebrate Jesus' coming this Christmas? Are you going to make time for that?

Today, we are fortunate that we are not waiting for the Messiah who is still to come. **[Exp]** He has already come and he is the one who saves; the one who forgives; the one who baptizes us with the Holy Spirit. The one who has brought to us the good news of the Kingdom of God! This is the same good news which Mark declares will occur in his Gospel account in his opening verse: Mark says 'The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ the Son of God.

**[B]** Brother and Sisters, the next time you come across a fruit fly sign, think of John the Baptist, who not only warned us about our sin but who went on to inform and point us to Jesus our Saviour. May we all go out today as repentant sinners who know that we need a Saviour, as we are unable to save ourselves **but** also go out with the full knowledge that God has sent us that Saviour in Jesus Christ. **[P]** Go in peace, knowing you are forgiven in Jesus. Go in eager expectation as we celebrate the birth of Jesus in a few weeks' times. AMEN

May the peace of God that passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN