We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

This is quite a sentence. In fact, it is more than a sentence, it is a declaration! …hopefully we all know it as the main clause in the Declaration of Independence. A founding document for the existence of our country. It is a piece of secular scripture if you will. Our forefathers wrote this declaration as a clear message both to the powers in England as well as to the people in the colonies: Things are about to change!

Now you and I are not seeking to establish a new country, but we declare things all the time. Allow me to share with you a few of the declarations I have made this past week:

“I am right!”

Which is naturally followed up by…”You are wrong!”

Our family likes to spend time together playing board games and so of course at the end of the evening I get to say my usual declaration: “I win!”

Which is naturally followed up with the customary, “You lose!”

Sometimes I am not so bullish…there have been occasions in which I have had to make a slightly different declaration: “I’m sorry.”..or something like that.

As we go through our days, you and I make all kinds of declarations, but did you know, that we are called by God to declare?

It’s true. Let’s turn to Isaiah chapter 40. Now, some of you do not like the Old Testament. Let me declare to you that you are wrong. Or at least mistaken. It’s still God’s word, and yes it is challenging, but everything Jesus ever said is based on this Old Testament. In fact Jesus came along and made all the rules more strict and harder to follow! Anyway, learn to love the Old Testament and read it, read it read it. And when you have questions about it, ask those questions. I will drop everything to have an Old Testament conversation with you. SO anyway, we are looking at the prophet Isaiah, chapter 40 and the context here is tricky. In chapter 39 we see Isaiah working with King Hezekiah, and King Hezekiah as a good King, he loved and obeyed God but he screwed up. He decided to show off all his wealth and the contents of his storehouse to some Babylonian ambassadors. See Hezekiah wanted to be in their good graces, to ally with them. But Isaiah is quite upset by this. At the end of chapter 39 Isaiah calls down judgement for Hezekiah’s lack of trust. Isaiah declares that Babylon is not your friend. They will ransack everything from your ancestors. When he hears this Hezekiah sort of wipes his brow, Whew, at least they won’t be a problem in my lifetime. Now you know when you are watching a movie and a dramatic scene ends with a fade. The next scene comes up with the words 3 years later or 30 years later…If you miss those words, you’re going to be very lost. So if you have your bibles…maybe not the pew Bibles, but if you have your own Bible with you today…take a pen or pencil and just before chapter 40 write in 150 years later. Yes, that’s correct…a bit of time had passed. And in that time Babylon did indeed conquer Israel and exiled the people. This is good to know so Isaiah’s words make a bit more sense. Isiah 40:1, Comfort, comfort my people, says the Lord. Now we know why they need comforting. Verse to proclaims forgiveness and verse 3 speaks of a voice. READ

Now remember, these are the words of Isaiah the prophet, which means, if he is a true prophet, these are actually the very words of God given to a human by the power of the Holy Spirit. Well guess what happened in 607 BC…Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon, just as Isaiah said. And look again at verse 8, God’s word will exist forever.

The first thing we need to know, a declaration is meaningless without unless it is authentic. What if our founding fathers did not really mean what they say? What if Isaiah was just fabricating some vague words of comfort and forgiveness? What if we declare Jesus as our Savior with our mouths but do not live it out with our lives?

A declaration is meaningless unless it is authentic.

Now we fast forward again to one of the most authentic men ever to declare anything! He is also a prophet and his name is John. He comes bursting out of the Judean wilderness dressed in camel hair (and probably nothing else) his favorite snack is giant locust dipped in a bit of wild honey. John most likely smells badly, he is not into social manners and he shouts…a lot! He quickly becomes known as John the Baptist, because he has a penchant for dunking people into the Jordan river.

John is the classic kook, someone to sneer at and write off as crazy. But he was certainly authentic. And authentic craziness will always draw a crowd. Eventually people got around the asking John who he was and John steals his answer right out of Isaiah chapter 40…He says: READ John is adding his name to a long line of prophets.

Now to be a Jew at that times was to play a waiting game. You lived under Roman Rule, a true prophet has long since spoken. God would have seemed so distant, as you waited for him to send a promised rescuer, a deliverer, a Savior.

So here comes a crazy man claiming to be a long awaited prophet. Everyone is starving to hear God’s word. And what does this new prophet declare? That the Lord is coming! Prepare the way!

This call to preparation leads us headlong into Advent. Advent is a time we as a church have designated as a time of preparation because the Lord is coming! All the earth is waiting, starving, grasping…dying to hear a word from the Lord. But I don’t want to focus on whether or not you or I are prepared for this coming…for many of us this is just another Christmas coming up. We’ve been through this. Decorate, bake, buy, wrap. It’s all the same. So yes, we all know how to prepare our homes, and prepare the loot, and prepare the meals. The most faithful among us might even know how to prepare our hearts. Maybe we read through an Advent devotional.

But I think John is calling us to something bigger than we expect. Something we are not quite able to do on our own. Something that will make this season not just another Christmas. John is not so much telling us to prepare ourselves…but to prepare others. We are being called to prepare others in our family, in our neighborhoods. We are being called to declare to others that it is time to prepare! The Lord is coming! A Savior is Born!

Now a word of caution, our declaration needs to be authentic. And not just emphatic, any actor can do that. Actors recite lines written by others in a way that makes it seem truthful. They say these words emphatically because it is their job to make and audience believe they really mean what they are saying. But we are not called to be actors. We are call to be preparers. We still speak the words of someone else…God’s words, not our own, but the authenticity does not come from our ability to seem like we mean what we say, our authenticity comes from our lives.

However, when it comes to our family members and out neighbors, it is crucial that our lives back up the words we declare. People are not interested in more declarations. But the person who declares with authenticity turns heads.

There is more: We do not declare alone. If we are willing to take on the prophetic role laid out for us, if we are willing to give our lives to the word God speaks, if we are willing to be his mouthpiece, then the Holy Spirit is really the one speaking. And if the Holy Spirit is the one speaking then our words have supernatural power. And if our words have supernatural power, then lives can be changed, hearts can be “strangely warmed” minds can be renewed and souls can be saved.

My friends, our world is a spiritual wilderness. People need the truth. Be a voice crying out.

Look at Isaiah 40 again: READ

This passage is for you. God is speaking to you, “Call out! Declare!

What do you want me to say you ask.

Say that we are grass…that beauty fades…but there is something that lasts forever. Something indelible and permeant and true. The Word of God. And of course we learn later on the Jesus himself is God’s Word come to us in the flesh…a Word that we are called to declare.

Jesus is coming! Let the neighbors know. Invite them over for dinner. Jesus is coming!