

Prepare the way of the Lord

APrepare ye the way of the Lord!@

How *does* John prepare the way of the Lord? First he calls us to repentance, to take a look at our lives, to stop taking them for granted, to stop our sleepwalking and to remind us what is truly important and what is not.

And after calling for us to take stock of our lives, he proclaims God=s mercy. He proclaims that dpes God love us, you know, even if we act in ways at times that are hardly endearing. That God loves us even where we feel unlovable For nothing is impossible for God, --even loving us, something we cannot always do for ourselves, even that is not impossible for God. John calls for us to summon the courage to accept God=s acceptance of us, however unacceptable we may feel at times, however guilty, however let down, however lost we may at times feel. For God does not who we could have been, if everything had worked out according to plan, if bad things hadn=t happened. God loves who we actually are, right here, right now. He loves us in our efforts to become better, but its not that better self that he loves right here, right now. That better self may someday exist, but if it does, it=s the child of who we actually right here, right now.

But to accept God=s love of us, we must make room. We must empty our hearts of competing distractions, we must detach our hearts from those desires whose satisfaction ultimately fails to truly satisfy, but only prompt yet another, and another and another, in what the Buddha called an ever revolving wheel of desire. Great for advertisers, they are counting on us to chase after our desires, one after another, but not so good for us, wearing ourselves out, running ourselves down. John calls upon us to rid our hearts of all that in the end only encumbers us, of all that ultimately only clutters, shutters, suffocates our soul.

For the light to enter we must draw the curtains and raise the shades. For God=s Spirit to enter, we must open the windows, air our soul out. To meet Christ we must leave ourselves, and meet our neighbor.

It is so easy to get stuck on ourselves. We can feel so vulnerable, so fragile, so wounded already, that we can become obsessed with protecting ourselves. We can feel so neglected, so overlooked that we come to fear that if we do not look out for ourselves, who will?

AThe spirit of the Lord God is upon me,@ cries the prophet Isaiah in our first reading

He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly
to heal the brokenhearted
to proclaim liberty to captives
and release to prisoners
to announce a year of favor from the Lord
a day of vindication by our God.

That=s us. God has sent Isaiah to console **us**, by reminding us of who we are and who our God is. How he cares for us, whether we know it or not, whether we want him to or not, whether we care for ourselves or not. And Isaiah calls us to bring this good news to those around us who feel as bereft as we sometimes do. For who better to address the brokenhearted than one who knows what it is like to have one=s heart broken. Who better to free the captive, than one who knows what its like to be imprisoned by desires that dominate, or fears that intimidate. Isaiah calls the Spirit of God down upon us to bring solace to the sorrowing, healing to the harmed, friendship to the friendless, again by drawing on our own past or even still present pain and suffering.

In short, Isaiah proclaims a break from the ways of the world. A year of favor from our Lord, a holiday you might say, or literally, a holy day. He offers release from our suffering through caring for others who suffer similarly. He offers healing through our becoming healers ourselves, using our own hard-won wisdom to aid our neighbor in their time of need.

We put Christ back into Christmas by becoming Christ to one another. It is indeed a curious paradox of grace, that we often begin to feel better about ourselves only when we start to do something for someone else. It is a curious paradox of faith that oftentimes it begins with a blind faith, a faith that we can be of use to another, even when we feel we are of no use to ourselves. But that is the logic of gifts. We must give to receive. Practice perfects.

We long for God=s light to shine in our darkness. We long for God=s love to warm our hearts. We long for God=s life to enliven **us**. This Advent as we await the coming of our Lord may we raise the blinds, clear away the clutter, sweep the floor and welcome in the Christ child..