

Make a Way
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Today we get the story of one of the most colorful characters in all of the Bible.

John the Baptist, a fore-runner of Jesus, a wild man who lived out in the wilderness, uncivilized, unclean, clothed in animal hides, and eating bugs.

Think of John like the stereotypical disheveled raving man with the cardboard sign that says, the end is near.

In every way he is described as outside of the norm.

And what is even more striking in Luke's account is the way that this unusual, and fairly insignificant figure is placed at the culmination of a list of the most powerful people of the day.

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, a during the high-

priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John in the wilderness.

Today, it might be like if we said, in the second year of the Presidency of Donald Trump, when Charlie Baker was the governor of Massachusetts, while Elizabeth Warren their Senator, and while Francis was the Pope, the word of God came to Dave in Fitchburg.

That is to say, the Word of God is coming into the world in some place unexpected. Some place that most folks would see as insignificant.

Surprising. Perhaps even unworthy.

Its a good story to get us ready for the one that is coming. God entering the world through the womb of a poor, un-wed mother, shut out of the hotels, giving birth in a barn, surrounded by animals, and scruffy shepherds.

Its a good story to shape how we look out into the world as Christians, listening for the wisdom of people from the margins, looking for leaders

among the poor, turning our attention away from the trappings of power to the real lives of real people hurting in our world.

But this passage does not only ask for us to watch and wait for God's coming into our world, in that surprising and unexpected way.

John the Baptist, quoting the prophet Isaiah, invites us to help "prepare the way."

Prepare the way.

Now "prepare the way of the Lord" is a very beautiful and holy sounding way of translating that passage. But the Greek words have a pretty straightforward meaning, and could also be rendered much more simply.

"Build a road for God."

And I actually think that Bostonians may actually uniquely qualified to understand the true potency of this Biblical passage.

And it is because of three little words that I hesitate to even mention lest they bring back anxiety and dread...

The Big Dig.

Anyone who lived in this area during that time can attest that making a way, building a road, is not a simple proposition.

Sure it might not be too much of a logistical nightmare to build a road out in some quiet countryside, with a single detail officer and a couple of detour signs.

But it get's a lot harder when you are trying to build that road through such a crowded and densely packed place.

Where there is already more than enough going on.

Where the roads are already full, where everyone is already a little on edge and stressed out, and where even little delays have massive ramifications.

So, let me ask you this. A couple weeks before Christmas.

What does your life feel like?

A unspoiled countryside, clear and open for anything, unencumbered and free?

Or a crowded city, with honking horns, traffic jams, where you always seem to be running a little late.

More often than not, my life feels like that crowded city. Full. Overfull perhaps. Maybe even a little more than I can handle.

And then along comes John, quoting Isaiah, saying. Make a way for God!
Make room for something unexpected and new to come into your life and change everything!

And too me, it feels like asking to burry the central artery, or sink a tunnel into Boston Harbor, or dig a tunnel to connect North and South Station.

That is, it is going to cause an incredible amount of disruption. It's going to make some of the old roads impassible. It's going to change my commute. It's going to affect everything.

Frankly, it almost sounds impossible.

A way for God. In the middle of all this! You've got to be kidding.

That's what John is telling us about here.

Making a way for God is not a simple matter of cutting down a few trees and winding a picturesque path through the forest.

Making a way for God drops a disruptive plan into the middle of our life.

And yes, in the end, the reordered roads will be better, much better.

But while it's happening. It can be kind of a mess.

It's because we are not making a space for God in the middle of lives that have plenty of room. We are trying to make space for God in the middle of lives that already seem too full.

We are trying to make space for God in the midst of lives where the voice of God gets drowned out by the thousands of other voices competing for our attention, where the work God calls us to get's pushed to the bottom of the to-do list, and where the peace we know in Christ is so hard to feel beneath the stress of living.

But as surely as a beautiful green park is nicer than a 6 lane elevated highway, making a way for God in our lives is well worth it.

This season of Advent is a time of preparing ourselves spiritually to look for the ways God is bursting into our world today. It is a time to re-tune our

hearts so that we can celebrate the beautiful and persistent surprise of God's love born for us.

And if that feels like too much to do along with the shopping and the baking and the decorating and the parties and the travel and the family joys and dramas.

Too much to add in with the disappointments and the painful memories and the family battles, and the hard feelings, and the stress.

That's because it is.

Making way for God cannot be something else that you add to all that.

Because it is something else entirely.

Making a way for God makes mountains flat, and valleys plain, it makes the rough places smooth, it shuts down roads, messes up your plans, makes you late, and turns the world upside down.

I believe that there is a surplus of God's spirit and presence all around us in just about any moment. There is nothing dramatic we have to do to conjure God's presence, or engineer a moment where the meaning of this season hits us.

Often we struggle mightily to have space for God in our lives, time for prayer, moments to experience transcendence. I think the easiest mistake to make is that God is going to fit in neatly right alongside everything else we already do and everything we already think, without too much fuss.

A wise Spiritual Director once told me: "you should pray for 30 minutes every day. That is unless your day is so busy and packed that you really cannot possibly spare 30 minutes. In that case. Pray for an hour."

I laughed. He was serious. And you know what. He is right. Because those moments when we have convinced ourselves that we couldn't possibly spare a moment of stillness, those are the moments we need God most of all. Even if it messes up our whole day.