



Sermon for January 12 – Prepare the Way

I vividly remember sitting and listening to my great uncle Wally tell stories to my Dad. Wally was in the road construction business in Colorado. My paternal great grandparents died when Wally was young and he did not want my grandfather to have to take care of him. So, he jumped on a train and went to Colorado. He saved money, bought equipment, and got into road construction.

The stories that fascinated me the most were the ones about creating passes in the Rocky Mountains. He spoke of how a bulldozer was driven up the mountain and wedged by a rock, and then another bulldozer was chained to that one and hung sideways, driving back and forth until it was level enough for the bulldozer to drive flat and clear the path. Then other equipment would begin the work as the bulldozers moved on to the next section. It was dangerous work. Anyone who has driven through the Rocky Mountains is thankful that such work was done.

It may be Baptism of Our Lord Sunday, but this story is far more about the work of John the Baptizer. He recites the words from the prophet Isaiah about preparing the way. It was dangerous work. He is out there on his own while church and political leaders lie in wait, hoping to stop him. His mission is to prepare people for the work of his cousin, Jesus.

This story harkens back to the time that Elizabeth and Mary spent together in the last chapter. Mary stays with Elizabeth until John was born and Zechariah was able to work again; It would be difficult to be a priest without a voice. Mary helped during that vulnerable time, preparing for the birth and making sure parenthood was off to a good start before returning home.

In this text, we have a reversal. Now it is John, the son of Elizabeth and Zechariah, who is preparing the way for Jesus. What does prepare for Christ look like? We tend to look at the work John was doing at the river. He is even named John the Baptizer, or the Baptist. There is more happening here than that. John is not just baptizing people. He is sharing some of the foundational elements of what it looks like to follow Christ.

If you have two coats and someone is without...share. He speaks of giving to the needs of others. The words that Jesus speaks to us about care for others are not new words. It is not a new message. It is the same message that we have heard from the start. The way that we respond to the love and grace of God is not to sit back and enjoy the easy life. From the start of scripture, we are told to share with those around us, to make sure that EVERYONE has food, drink, shelter, and knows God's love and grace.

This work is not just for John the Baptizer. It is our work, our mission, too. Sometimes we get confused and think that being a Christian is all about whether or not we attend worship, or tithe, or pray. Those are all great things. We are also called to prepare the way. We are called into the same work that was shared in this story. We are to make sure the needs of those around us are met.

Why is this so important? The fact remains that the human brain is not able to even comprehend grace or forgiveness until the basic needs are met. If people are hungry, starving, food insecure, without shelter...if these basic needs are not met, their brain cannot begin to even hear or comprehend the good news of God's love and forgiveness.

Like those bulldozers hanging on the side of a mountain, John the Baptizer was in the dangerous place of preparing the way. He was preaching a message that stood against the context of Roman rule. He remained faithful and preached the promise of the Christ. He prepared the way by reminding people to care for others. We are called into that same work. May we never tire of preparing the way. Amen.

Pastor Michael Schmidt