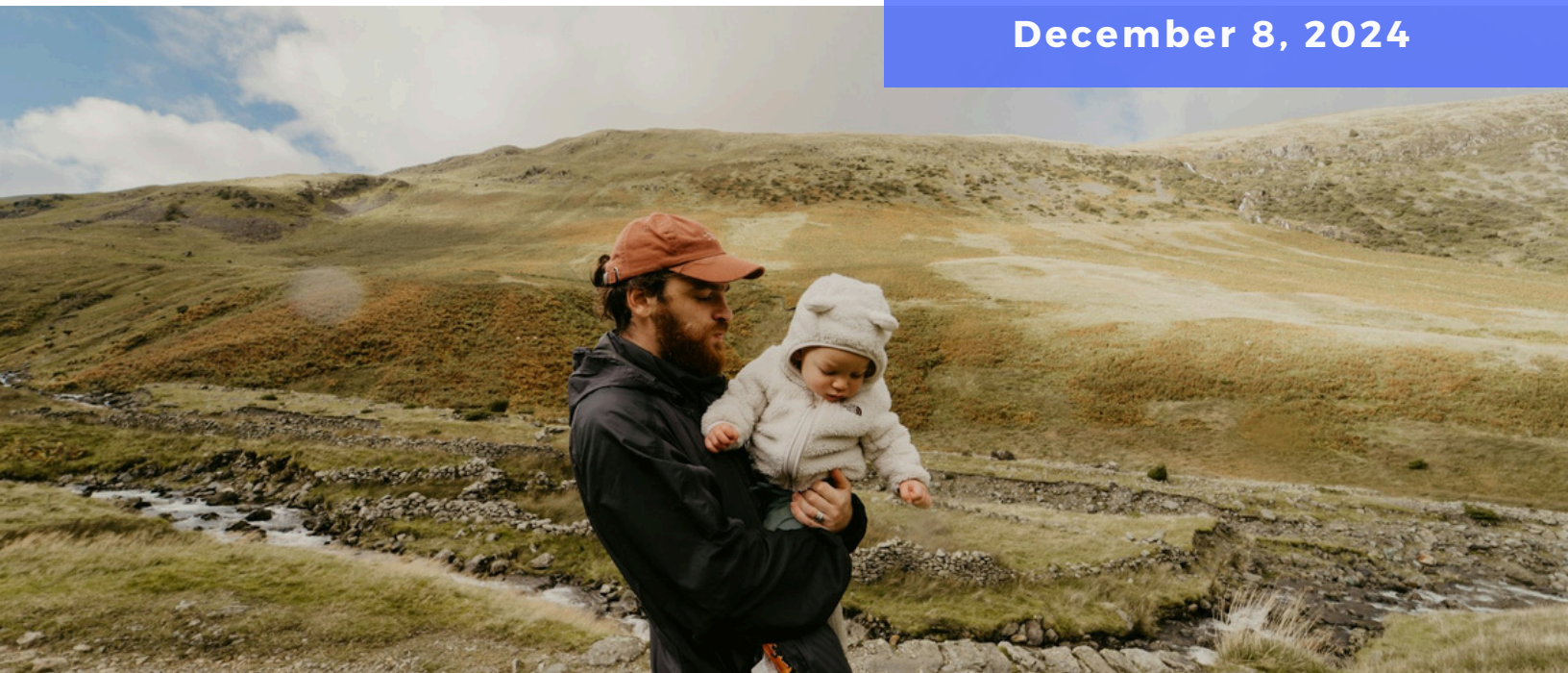


THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

December 8, 2024



PREPARE

the voice of one crying out in the wilderness

by Drew Downs

John the Baptist makes a dramatic entrance, declaring the loneliness of the voice calling for organizing a whole mass of people for dramatic change. It is how we get things like weekends and holidays, civil rights and national parks. And yet it is far too easy today to pretend that roads straighten themselves. That the mountains just level off and valleys fill themselves in. Or else the higher power we call God does the work for us and to us, like a gift.

John offers a rallying cry to the people that expresses their dissatisfaction with the status quo. That there are too many obstacles to God's grace and too few working to change that. If this sounds like revolutionary talk, then you're on the right track. But John describes the need to prepare the way for the revolution; a kind of pre-revolution. One that we might say opens doors for God to pass through. That our work is to set God up for success here and everywhere.

ADVENT

2024

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Advent 2: Prepare

Thanksgiving weekend often lands right before the first Sunday in Advent. We spend this time with friends and family (physically or in memory) or perhaps alone as a kind of respite from them! But for many of us, it is a time to remember to be thankful. It is the manifestation of my encouragement this past summer: to feast, preferably with others! There is a kernel of divine truth within every gathering, every feasting, every joyous celebration that embodies camaraderie and generosity.

It also kicks off the secular Christmas season, when we are encouraged to gorge ourselves on electronics, toys, clothes, and gadgets we may desire for a moment's time, but will soon grow weary of. This is a natural process psychologists call hedonic adaptation. It's why we're never satisfied with our stuff and our favorite foods start to bore us after awhile. Our brains adjust to a new normal, so they want more novelty. Something new, preferably shiny.

Many modern prophets call us to consume less. Buy less stuff, yes, but also consume less "content". This, too, is explained by psychology as leading to our present overwhelm and tolerance for propaganda—because there is so much we stop dreaming, imagining things can be different.

When John invites those hearing him to "prepare the way of the Lord" he is trusting they can imagine a better world. One that actually matches the justice of God. For us, that begins with freeing our hearts and minds to even imagine such a world.

With love,
Drew

ADVENT

2024

FOR SUNDAY

Advent 2C

December 8, 2024

Collect

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

Luke 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled,

and every mountain and hill shall be made low,

and the crooked shall be made straight,

and the rough ways made smooth;

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

ADVENT

Reflection

The evangelist we call Luke has grounded this moment of John the Baptist coming out of the wilderness in a moment, laying out the time and political landscape of the known world. It brings specificity and historicity to this moment. But it does something else, too. It brings to mind the very powers of the world and set all of that up against the one who comes to straighten the roads for God and bring salvation to the people. So, if we don't read this as a bold political statement, we are missing the boat!

There are other bits in here that could hold our attention. That the Roman emperor rules the region and his officer rules Jerusalem. We remember that the person sitting on the throne of Galilee was put there by those very people and that *his* brother rules another region. So we shouldn't confuse this for self-determination or even the failed "divine right of kings". These are an occupied people living under the boot of empire and John is promising them freedom.

This is an essential message this time of year, as we prepare for the happiest time of the year, when the world sings together and miracles happen. This isn't always true for everyone, but everyone has witnessed its truth. And yet, so little of that joy gets connected to liberation and salvation—the very promises of the incarnation!

As we continue through this season of Advent, calling one another into a time of joy and hope, let us keep in mind the things that lead to more permanent conditions of joy and hope that last well beyond the season or the next one and the year ahead, but last our lifetimes. Starting with our faith in Christ and continuing out into our neighborhood and region and nation. Ensuring we all have food, shelter, clothes to wear, and opportunities for fellowship and utility. Treating each other with dignity and respect, offering hope and faith to one another. God needs some path-straightening and we've all been recruited to work on it.

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