

“Prepare the Way of the Lord, make his paths straight...
Crooked roads make straight”

Sermon notes by the Rev. Arnold A. Bush, Priest in Charge, Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, Tallassee, AL 36978, Advent IIC, and December 9, 2012.

Summary Sentence: How and who has done a ministry of spiritual preparation for you? What is involved in making a path to the Lord straight, smooth, and crevices filled? Simplicity does help.

I Introduction to John the Baptist

Text: Luke 3:1-6 John the Baptist. A rough prophet in the Judean Hills, near the Dead Sea, Jericho, preaching repentance, shape up or ship out, repent for your evil ways a Messiah is coming.

John publicly condemned Herod Antipas by marrying Herodias and this cost him his head on a platter. Many in Jerusalem had become complacent, lacking in excitement. There had been 200 years without a prophet. Thus, he was preparing the people.

II Pre.....pare... ye..... the... way of the Lord.(From Jesus Christ SuperStar). Let's look at some snapshots of the Ministry of Preparation.

1. A child the night before a school day. This last Thursday Am three grandchildren in Spanish Fort...cloths, book bag, homework, permission slips, packing a sandwich, blessing of the parent, getting to the bus stop at 6:30 am. Are you prepared for your classes today, homework, lunch, One granddaughter on a band trip to place McAdory in 5A Football. We leave at 10 am for Auburn what am I going to eat... 10-5:00 pm \$11.00 snacks. They were rather Parent Dependent on preparing for school. Parents and public school preparing them for live. Parents role in their education..... But what about life: in the Baptismal vow I will be responsible for seen that the child is brought up in the Christian Faith and life..... and by my prayers and witness help them to grow into the full stature to Christ. Does the parent has a

ministry of preparation that they may know Christ and participate in the life of the church?

2. Another snap shot is seeing young children participate in the life of Christian congregation. In my own life as a teen ager in Laurel MS my parents were not overly active in First Presbyterian Church and half block away was St. John's Episcopal Church. In writing my spiritual autobiography we were asked to write an outline of persons who influenced in becoming a Christian. I recall coaches, teachers, youth advisors, clergy, a superintendent of the SS in St. John's. Guy Henry Cathcart....I was doing our early morning walk with a priest from New Philadelphia, Ohio. He said he had a family who lived in Laurel, MS. Their name if Guy Henry Cathcart and Kate... They are in their late 80'. So that night I wrote them a letter thanking him were being an influence in my life in Laurel. I pasted are 2 page resume to let them know about my family and churches I had served. So the next day I gave the letter to Fr. Paul, and he gave this to them at their Thursday Eucharist. The called me late Thursday, very pleased with the letter. We are going to be buried in Laurel... we were 1st cousin a high school peer of yours. So the "village" in St. John's prepared me for my Christian Journey. If you were asked to write out
3. Think about a traveling salesman leaving for a three day ttrip in is van or car. He will be preparing himself to listen to the needs of his vendor... be alert to their needs and how he may help. A few years ago my son is a Manufactory's Rep. for Russell Corporation Had surgery on his shoulder so he could not handle is display carrying it into the retail store. We went to about 10 stops in AR. (who has a main operation in Alexander City). I recall Andew saying, the key is be prepared to listen to their needs when he makes a call. We may not be a traveling salesperson, but do not we need to be prepared to listen how others express their needs.
4. Another snapshot: Suppose you are going on a long trip driving across the country. Or maybe you are preparing for a trip into a

foreign country. I recall Zoe and I booked ourselves on a cruise around Northern Europe. Before leaving we read brochures on every city we would have a tour, Dover England, Netherlands, Burlin, GR' St. Petersburg, Russia. Our preparation and knowing some of the history especially the effects of WWII the fall for Communism in Russia helps us see and understand I lot more more from the Professional Guides. I recall standing in front of Rembrandt's the *Prodigal Son*. (Book by Henri Nouwem) . Our life together where we share the God Moments or the Epiphanies in our lives prepares us to see more God Moments. As we share with others our serendipitous moments with God, Just like he call from Guy Henry Cathcart 57 years ago. Also, as we study the Bible seeing the interventions of God in the lives of the characters in the Bible stories.

5. Thus as we look at John the Baptized, his role was to STIR UP THE CROWS WHO CAME TO HEAR HIM PREACH DOWN ON THE JORDAN RIVER. Are you sometime in a spiritual drowsiness or spiritual sleepiness.... Just barely awake. If we think about any coach in High School or college... one of their roles is to teach them the sills of basketball, soccer, football, volleyball, but another important aspect of this role is to STIR THE PLAYER UP BEFORE THE GAME. TO GET THEM EMOTIONALLY READY TO PLAY AT THEIR BEST. Certainly one role of the priest is to stir up form a "blaues" blues' spiritual drowsiness or get you awake. The Ministry of Preparation is to getting yourself ready of Meeting Christ in the Eucharistic Worship. Such as maybe reading over the lessons.... Especially the Gospel. Prepare to offer needs and thanksgivings at the Altar. Have you done you personal prayers through the week. I recall conducting a workshop on ways of paying... a few confessed that the only time they prayed was in the worship.....The Christian life is both personal and corporate. Suppose someone said they were taking you to game of Lacross or Cricket in England. With no orientation of how the game is

played... then you are expected to enjoy it and get excited about who was playing.

6. In speaking of these snapshots we remember John the Baptist did a ministry of preparation... Let us recall with thanksgiving those who prepared us to come into a relationship with Christ and His Church. Second, let us share those cherished Godly influences into our lives so others may know when God is intervening into their lives.

III Making a path for the Lord, means removing what ever
Impedes the flow of traffic.

Removing this CLUTTER MEANS TO SIMPLIFY.

1. What are the barriers to God in our personal life and lifestyle? What is blocking our path to God? If you are ever in a group where folks begin speaking about the blocks and barriers to God they will often reveal several. Too Busy, too much to care for, too many irons on the fire, multi-tasking, no space in our schedules, pressure to achieve.... Etc. The crowded schedule.... The pressure to achieve and perform.

THE REMEDY SEEMS TO BE THE DISCIPLINE OF SIMPLICITY.

Richard Foster in his book Celebration of Discipline speaks about Simplicity. He has a popular book on this.

I have heard some many folks saying we are downsizing our life style. But there are two PARTS TO SIMPLICITY:

AN OUTWARD LIFESTYLE.....AN INWARD LIFESTYLE

Jesus said "Blessed are the Pure in Heart, for they shall see God, MT 5. Kierkegaard, 19th century German Theologian used a profound title: Purity of Heart is to Will one Thing.

I recall knowing couple who heard about making their life more simple....Garage sale, clearing out clutter in attic, closet, moving to a smaller home, discipline in appointments... walks in the

woods, organic gardening, but they missed a very important thing in enjoying this Simplicity.. They did not lean to Seek first the kingdom of God. To use Soren Kierkegaard's phrase they did not seek the will of God. Deep in their souls they did not enjoy God. Their lifestyle was substitute for God. As one seeks God in the morning, at noon in the afternoon, and in the evening, this gives this trust and security. As one begins to a practice of seeking God into their lives they have less anxiety, less desire for more and more possessions.

IV Three Inner Attitudes that are helpful : (Richard Foster)

1. Life is a gift from God (CREDO Experience)
2. God is in the business of taking care of us... thus we need to trust Him.
3. What we have available to others. Jesus' words about "do not be anxious" what we shall eat, wear, or sleep in.

V Some outward Principles of the outward expression of Simplicity:

These are not legalistic rules. (From Richard Foster's books)

"Here Arnold goes to meddling and not preaching"

1. Purchase things for their usefulness rather than their status.
2. Learn to reject anything that is producing and addiction for you.
3. Develop a habit of giving things away. (North Pole Priest)
4. Refuse to be propagandized by the custodians of modern gadgetry. Is more and more better?
5. Learn to enjoy thing without owning them.
6. Develop a deeper appreciation of creation. Listen to the sounds around your neighborhood.
7. Be prudent regarding the "buy now and pay later"
8. Take serious about instructions regarding plan, honest speech in Matthew 5:37, "let what you say be simply "yes" or "no" anything more than this comes from evil." Avoid flattery and "maybes"
9. Reject anything that will breed the oppression of others.
10. Reject whatever distractions we have that keeps us from focusing on our main goal of Seeking First the kingdom of God.

These may be our path to follow God that impedes the traffic to and from Him.

Reread Luke 3:4-5