

Message from Robin+

*The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

*As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,*

*“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,*

*who will prepare your way;*

*the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:*

*‘Prepare the way of the Lord,*

*make his paths straight, ’”*

*John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”* Mark 1:1-8

Last week we explored the idea of speaking truth to God. We heard the prophet Isaiah demand that God tear open the heavens and come down, and God has torn open the heavens and come down in the person of Jesus. This week the prophet John the Baptizer speaks truth about the coming of the Son of God.

Author Rachel Held Evans noted that prophets use both story and poetry to shine a light on the past, present, and future in a way that shows us the sharp contrast between the way things are and the way things should be. Prophets show us the contrast between the ways of power-hungry people and the ways of a loving God; they contrast the path of cruelty and injustice with the path of righteousness, and the kingdoms of this world with the Kingdom of God.

Being a prophet is hard work. It’s unpopular. It can make you highly suspect in your social circles. Plenty of people thought the Old Testament guys like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Jonah were crazy. John the Baptizer was no stranger to the hard life of a prophet and he eventually died for what he proclaimed. Prophets then and now risk everything to speak the truth, and they must overcome great fear to speak on behalf of God and on behalf of God’s people.

But the prophets of old, and the prophets of today, are important. They keep us awake. They get our attention. They help us to notice the realities of good and evil. Prophets are not afraid to tell us that God favors the marginalized over the powerful, the weak over the strong, the poor over the rich. They point out injustice and cry out for us to prepare the way of the Lord, to make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

So how do we prepare the way of the Lord? How do we make straight in the desert a highway for our God? Especially these days - when the world is starting to look like one big desert, one scary wilderness? I ask this question because I believe *we are all called* at various times not only to recognize the prophets, but also to *be* prophets, to speak truth through our words and actions.

Now that anyone can say anything on the internet, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish true prophets from false prophets. Is the news real or is it fake? Early Church father Augustine of Hippo evidently had a similar problem in his own day, and that was way before televised news and the internet. People were expressing their thoughts on the way scripture should be interpreted and as you might imagine, not everyone was in agreement with some of the conclusions drawn. Augustine gave the scholars of his time a way to determine the truth of scripture, God's intent for our interpretation of scripture, and it is a good method to apply not only to the way we read scripture, but also to the way we make choices in life.

Here is what Augustine offers to us -

“Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought.”

As we move through these days of Advent, give us grace, merciful God, to be your true prophets, using this filter of love of God and neighbor in every word and action, that your truth might be revealed.

John the Baptist in the Wilderness is an oil painting on oak panel executed c. 1480–1490 by the early Netherlandish painter Geertgen tot Sint Jans.