

**Prepare the way of the Lord**  
**Doug Floyd**  
**Apostles Anglican**  
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A voice cries out, "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord."

Come all you saints and sinners, prepare your hearts for the coming of the Lord. Come you weak and weary. Find rest for your souls. Come you strong and full of vigor. Behold the source of your life. For the King approaches. Come you poor and rich alike. Offer your lives in worship. Come you hungry and full, behold the feast has been set before us. Come you joyful. Come you grieving. Put on the garment of praise for the Comforter stands among us with healing in his wings. Let us all come before the throne of mercy and grace, to watch and wait together for the Lord, the Savior, the Redeemer who brings salvation to His people and to His world.

John stands at the edge of the Promised Land crying out, "Prepare the way of the Lord!"

Clothed in camel's hair and leather belt like a prophet of old, he stands at the end and beginning of Israel. He calls out to the Jews, the people of God, the children of Abraham, "Bear the fruit of repentance." He invites them into the waters that cleanse. Entering the Jordan is like re-entering the Promised Land for a people who have been lost in the wilderness.

Some are insulted by his pertinence. Who does he think he is? Calling us to repentance? Calling us to wash in the Jordan? Call us to re-enter the Promised Land like somehow we are outsiders to the covenant of God?

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Though some despise him, others heed the call. People stream into the waters of death and life, the place of repentance. They come in search of the promise of God. John the Baptist points beyond himself. "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:7-8).

John is the great prophet, the great witness who points beyond himself to the King who comes. In John, the great prophetic tradition of Elijah, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah and others come in to fullness. Bearing the weight of his ancient forebears, John calls out. He is a voice.

John must fade before the Lamb, the Lord, the Anointed One. "I am not worthy to loose his sandals." He was not the Light but sent to bear witness to the Light. John cries out, "He must increase. I must decrease."

In John's cry, we hear the voice of all of Israel make way for the coming of the Lord. Father Abraham must stand aside before the coming One. The children of Israel must kneel as the King processes by. Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon all must make way. The King is Coming. The Lamb who takes away the sin of the world is coming.

Israel is but a voice crying out, before the Word made Flesh.

The Lord who has come and is coming fulfills the history of Israel and all other nations. He is the truly Beautiful One that we long to behold and worship. In Him, in Christ alone all epochs, all kingdoms, all things in heaven and earth are gathered in adoration. For all things have been formed and sustained in and through Him, and to Him all things, all peoples owe their allegiance.

He must increase and we must decrease. We must become the sounding voice of praise. In our eating and our drinking, in our rising and our sleeping, in our working and our resting, we are made for the praise of His glory. We gather before the throne with all the angels and join together as one voice,

"Worthy are you, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things,  
and by your will they existed and were created." (Revelation 4:11)

A voice crying out, A voice sounding from age to age, A voice of the people of God, A voice of all creation exclaiming,

Glory to God in the Highest!

A voice cries out, "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord."

John calls out in the wilderness. Again and again the people of God enter the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord. Abraham was called to leave his land, his family and his father's house to go to land that the Lord would show. So our great father in the faith, left.

He left civilization behind and entered a life of wandering in the wilderness, following the call of God. Moses heeds the call, leaving Pharaoh's house, leaving Midian, walking from slavery to freedom. Leading the children of Israel through Red Sea and across the wild places to the foot of the Holy Mountain.

“Whom have I in heaven but you O Lord, and to be near you I desire nothing on earth.”  
The desert places, the waste places, the forsaken places have become the home of God’s people, walking toward the call of God, walking in the way of God, and to the promise of God. Walking to Eden. To the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. To the city alight with the glory of God where all relations are ordered in and through the love of Jesus Christ.

We walk with the saints across the ages toward the holy city of God. Yet even as walk and long and seek for Beulah Land, we walk through the wilderness of sin and death. In the valleys, death casts a shadow that covers the wilderness way in gloom, grief, hopelessness and despair. The wreck of sin wrecks havoc all around us and all within us.

Broken, broken, broken is the once bountiful land. There is none righteous. No not one.

- 11 no one understands;  
no one seeks for God.
- 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;  
no one does good,  
not even one.”
- 13 “Their throat is an open grave;  
they use their tongues to deceive.”  
“The venom of asps is under their lips.”
- 14 “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”
- 15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood;  
16 in their paths are ruin and misery,  
17 and the way of peace they have not known.”
- 18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (Romans 3:11-18)

The news resounds: a daily reckoning of human sin and depravation. Man against man. Nation against nation. The way of peace we have not known. Striving, striving, striving for recognition. Striving for glory. Striving for wealth. For sex. For power. Striving to be gods, we crumble and curse and fall and die.

Thousands upon thousands upon thousands in the valley of decision, in the valley of destruction, in the valley of depression, in the valley of regret, in the valley of judgment. We bear the scar of sin in our very bones. We smile and sing and curse and crush.

In the wilderness of sin and death, in the wilderness of loss and pain, in the wilderness of feeling forsaken and forgotten. In the wilderness where all that was good has dried and died and faded. In the wilderness, we still hear and feel the scream of Eden’s fall, the terror of a world descending, descending into darkness, into nothingness, into rage and destruction, into the fires of judgment.

All that is good languishes, fades and falls. How can you sustain hope in a world of such hate and destruction, of such lies and deceit? From generation to generation man destroys and is destroyed. How do we keep from growing weary in well-doing?

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Beneath the growl of sin and Satan, the Lord of love roars.

"Comfort, yes, comfort My people!"

Says your God.

- 2 "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her,  
That her warfare is ended,  
That her iniquity is pardoned;  
For she has received from the Lord's hand  
Double for all her sins."

- 3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

"Prepare the way of the Lord;

Make straight in the desert

A highway for our God.

- 4 Every valley shall be exalted  
And every mountain and hill brought low;  
The crooked places shall be made straight  
And the rough places smooth;

- 5 The glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
And all flesh shall see *it* together;  
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

The very wilderness of sin and death is being transformed. The bitter water made sweet. Yes, we walk through the dark wilderness on pilgrimage to the Holy City, but as we walk, Jesus goes before us, behind us, above us, below us. Our Lord, our provider, our comforter does not forsake us, but reveals His glory in us through us.

Jesus says, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. <sup>38</sup> He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38). Living water, healing water. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God. The Lord of glory comforts with living water and flows through to comfort and heal the world around us.

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Yes. In the wilderness, the dark places, in the places of pain, the broken places in the valley of the shadow of death, He is preparing a Highway of Holiness. The way of the Lord is being revealed. His healing grace flows from age to age, from person to person. He is transforming us and lifting us and all creation into His glory.

**35** The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus;

<sup>2</sup> it shall blossom abundantly  
and rejoice with joy and singing.  
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,  
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.  
They shall see the glory of the Lord,  
the majesty of our God.

<sup>3</sup> Strengthen the weak hands,  
and make firm the feeble knees.

<sup>4</sup> Say to those who have an anxious heart,  
“Be strong; fear not!  
Behold, your God  
will come with vengeance,  
with the recompense of God.  
He will come and save you.”

<sup>5</sup> Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

<sup>6</sup> then shall the lame man leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.  
For waters break forth in the wilderness,  
and streams in the desert;

<sup>7</sup> the burning sand shall become a pool,  
and the thirsty ground springs of water;  
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,  
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

<sup>8</sup> And a highway shall be there,  
and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;  
the unclean shall not pass over it.

It shall belong to those who walk on the way;  
even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.

<sup>9</sup> No lion shall be there,  
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;  
they shall not be found there,  
but the redeemed shall walk there.

10 And the ransomed of the Lord shall return  
and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain gladness and joy,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

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So we heed the voice crying, we turn, we watch, we wait for the coming of the Lord. Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he is with us and he will lift up every valley into His redeeming light. We look and long for the fullness of redemption revealed in Christ alone. We prepare the way. We turn to Him in repentance, in hope, in faith, in love. We watch with expectant hearts for He is coming.

And when He appears and we behold His glory, we will be transformed and our whole life will have been as the twinkling of an eye.