

A Journey of 1000 Miles Begins With One Step... Advent 2, 2025

Why in the world would you go way out into the wilderness to seek a crazed hermit? Listen to how he greets us...

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham." (Luke 3:7-8)

He calls us vipers. Snakes. Poisonous. Deadly. Today, he would say: Do not begin to say to yourself 'I am Christian,' if you do not also do Christian things. God considers any person who does Christ-like things to be Christian - so don't think you get special status just because you're wearing a cross. What you DO says who you are.

But he's not done insulting and threatening us.

John continued, "Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

And the crowds asked him, "What, then, should we do?"

In reply John said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise."

Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?"

John said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you."

Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

Today, we ask: John, what should we do to be Christian?

- Share your resources. Be equal with one another.
- Don't cheat or steal. Be honest with one another.
- Don't lie or threaten. Those with power must not use it for personal gain.

The story continues, "As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah,"

Why would they think he is the promised one, the messiah? Actually, this is why we would go walking out into the desert and suffer his verbal abuse. He has all the right signs to fulfil the old prophecies of the Coming One.

Long ago, the temporary foreign worker Elijah was called a troublemaker. He could hear God's Word, and God did miracles through Elijah such as raising the dead, calling fire from heaven, and never-ending flour and oil sources. Elijah usually was in the wilderness with this or that king looking to kill him for criticizing them and telling them of God's disapproval

of their actions. Elijah was described as "a hairy man" or "a man with hair" wearing a leather belt. Once he survived in the wilderness on food God sent him through nature. At the end of his ministry, a fiery chariot swung down from heaven between him and his disciple Elisha. Then Elijah wasn't seen any more.

People say he never died, he was carried up to heaven, and so he will return when the Time of God is arriving.

To this day Jews leave a chair out for Elijah, invite him in weekly, and anticipate his return.

Because when this hair-covered, belt wearing, wilderness prophet comes... so too does the perfect realm of God.

Could John be Elijah? Could John be the Promised One, the Returned One, the Messiah, the Saviour?

Wouldn't you want to journey with me out to see for ourselves if the prophecies were being fulfilled?

And we find a man covered in hair, with a leather belt, camped by water, preaching with power... this is pretty promising.

So, "As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

John says he isn't the Messiah. But he is preparing the way for the Messiah.

John then continues, "His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

And so with many other exhortations he proclaimed the good news to the people."

Wait! What?! How is this good news?!

Hellfire and brimstone are not good news. Judgement and damnation are not good news. The good news is the coming of the messiah and the perfect age of God. The good news is the current reality with a brood of vipers will be replaced by a world where peace reigns - where (Isaiah 11:6-9)

The wolf shall live with the lamb;
the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the lion will feed together,
and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp cobra,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder viper's den.

They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

Ahh.... the good news is we are nearing the turning point. Much like we are now in sunlight - we are approaching the winter solstice and the days will again begin to be longer.

And we have the hope we are reaching that turning point in the USA, when people will come to their senses, reach across aisles, and return that country away from fascism.

John is hope.

Audacious hope.

Hope in spite of hopelessness.

John is a prophet. Prophets come to call people back to their faith and to reinterpret their faith to meet the current crisis.

To repent is to turn back. And he calls people to repent.

The current crisis is greed, and lies, and abuse of power. He calls people to stop these things. He reminds us faith is not just what group we belong to - but what we cause in the world. Our impact.

And it is a journey. It isn't a be baptized and go forth and sin. Or "living in sin with a safety pin." To be faithful to God is to regularly repent, regularly take stock of what we are doing and saying and contributing towards - and making adjustments to be more aligned with God's realm.

Being Christian is... driving a car. You can't point it towards Espanola and then let go of the wheel and just expect to get... even across the bridge... without adjusting the wheel.

Repenting is adjusting. Navigating. Re-aiming towards that goal of being Christ-like. Life, snow, turns in the road, detours and construction - business and chaos - intentional or unintentional turn offs interrupt our path. It is a journey.

It is a journey to be Christian. It is a lifestyle. It is a way of being. Each moment is one step of the 1000 miles journey.

Speaking for myself, I am very glad to have you all along with me for this trip. I am glad we're on the road called Advent, Arrival. I'm glad we have the time every year of Preparing-For-Christ's-Birth—Advent—and of Preparing-For-Christ's-Resurrection—Lent. It is a twice-a-year time to pause, reflect, and think – where am I on my journey? Where are we on our journey? Do we need to correct? Do I need to repent – to turn back the way I've come?

The colour purple or blue is used in Advent and in Lent. These are the colours of penitence, repenting, sorrow, regret, turning back ... and they're also the colours of royalty, glory, richness, victory. These things go hand-in-hand. The journey of Christianity is a

journey that leads us to the glory of God and a journey that involves a lot of trying, failing, and trying again.

The good news of John, and Jesus, is that the realm of God is at hand. Here. Nigh. Close by. Among us. Within us. Around us. We are on a journey, yes, but it isn't us trying to walk to the moon. Heaven has come to us. Here. So although we make mistakes, God stays with us and keeps guiding us back on paths of righteousness. We are not alone on this journey. Not only do we have one another, we have the others who have gone before us, the ones who will come after us, and we have God God's self traveling with us. And whether we wander in the wilderness for 40 days or 40 years, God sticks with us and guides us nudge by nudge towards the Promised Land.

May God bless our journey with the awareness we are never alone. **Amen.**

Luke 1:67, 76 -80

Zechariah's Prophecy

⁶⁷ Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

⁷⁷ to give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins.

⁷⁸ Because of the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,

⁷⁹ to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace."

⁸⁰ The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

Luke 3: 2b – 6

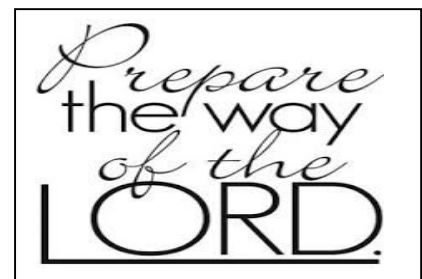
² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴ as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.

⁵ 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,

⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' "



May God's spirit shape our understanding of these words.

And may they awaken in our hearts