

The Glory of God

- [Baruch 5:1-9](#)
- [Luke 3:1-6](#)
- [\(Isaiah 40:3-5\)](#)

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas out there, but here, in the wisdom of the ancient church, we are still preparing, we are still listening to the prophets, we are still in Advent. And it wouldn't be Advent without John the Baptizer, the voice crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way"

Our first reading this morning was from the book of Baruch. This is a book which didn't make it into the canon of books that we consider to be the Bible. Many of the early church fathers considered Baruch to be as important as Jeremiah, even a part of Jeremiah but it got left out when Jerome translated the sacred texts into Latin and since that translation became the authoritative text for the Western church, Baruch got left behind.

The passage we heard this morning has a beautiful expansion of the metaphor of hills being made low and the valleys raised up. Let's listen to that again:

God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God. The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command. For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.

Now listen to the verses of Isaiah 40 which are quoted in the gospel reading:

A voice cries out:

‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.’

Did you notice the difference? In Baruch the level ground is in order that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God; in Isaiah a highway for God is to be prepared. In Baruch, God is doing the road work so that Israel can return safely from the Babylonian exile, in Isaiah it is more ambiguous but the way it gets quoted in Luke it is clear that *we* are to prepare the way because it is placed in the context of John preaching the repentance of sins.

So which is it? God makes a highway for us? We make a highway for God?

Let’s take a vote...

... it’s not really an either/or situation is it. This is one of those divine paradoxes. God is making a highway for us AND we are part of the road crew. Our faith is never a spectator sport, even though we are entirely dependent upon God’s grace for everything.

We are not forced to participate in this great work of creating equality and safety. But when we say yes, when we surrender our ego desires to the work of God we get to be part of God's glory being seen.

Because that's what it's all about, in both passages – “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,” says Isaiah and Bruch says, “God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.”

That's what we are waiting for, that is the hope and the joy and the longing of Advent – that God's glory *will be revealed. Glory is not a word we use much in every day speech. I looked up the definition and got “Magnificence or great beauty, high renown or honor.” We long for the day when God's beauty and magnificence will be revealed.

And that day is today.

People of God, the glory of our ever-loving and astonishing God is revealed every day in nature and among God's people – yes, you and me.

And it is our work to magnify that beauty and magnificence – to reflect it so that all the world can see God's mercy and righteousness and beauty and magnificence. We are like mirrors, reflecting the sun. Mirrors have to be smooth just as the wilderness has to be prepared. Our rough edges get in the way of God's glory being revealed in our world. Our work is to allow God to transform us more and more into the image of God, more and more into the people we were created to be. Remember the words of Thomas Merton, “There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.”

Walking around shining like the sun. That is what it means to prepare God's way – it means to be who we really are. The glory of God is revealed as we step onto the highway that God is preparing for God's children.

In our Advent course on Thursday, we looked at the passage in Romans 8 where Paul tells us that “the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.” (Romans 8:19). The creation is waiting, eagerly, for us to realize that we are the daughters and sons of the living God and to start living that way. To start reflecting the glory of God in the righteousness and mercy we show, in the joy we share, in the astonishing knowledge that God loves us through and through.

Someone once told me that the guardian angel of St. Benedict's is named Gloria. Isn't that wonderful – to think that we are overlit by an angelic being whose very name reflects God's glory.

In our worship we glorify God as we praise God's magnificence and beauty. Worship is an expression of our love and also a way in which we experience God's love more directly. God's glory is also God's self-giving love. This is the underlying message of John's gospel which describes Jesus' life and his death as glorifying God (John 27: 1-5).

It is all about God's glory and reflecting that magnificence and beauty. Which is also all about worship. Which is also all about love.

Which brings us back to John the Baptizer because in order to become the people we are made to be, in order to show God's image, we have to repent. We have to turn away from our self-centered ways and re-center ourselves in Christ. This process of repenting and re-centering is an

ongoing journey because we are always being challenged. The more we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us, the more we listen to God's word, the more we intentionally praise and glorify God, the more we find places in ourselves that need to be transformed. Places that need to be levelled. And then it is time again to offer the places of hurt, the unhealed places, the unholy places, to God.

Before I close, let me remind us that these Bible passages were not written for individuals but for the people of God, the whole society of Israel. It was the collective community that was to transform in such a way that it could show forth God's glory.

It is only too evident how far we are from showing God's glory as a country, one nation under God. It is easy for us to turn away from the pain and the conflicts and individualize these readings, as I have done this morning. But as citizens of this world as well as citizens of heaven, we are called to work to create an equal and fair society where everyone can experience God's mercy and righteousness, 'Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'

May God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the strength and the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Amen

