

Isaiah 40: 1-11 Prepare the way of the Lord

In the church year, we are in a season of preparation called "Advent." Advent is a Latin word which means "approach" or "arrival." Advent is that time of the year when we prepare for the arrival of Christ. The season of Advent is for us Christians: just as we do all kinds of things to prepare gifts, like shopping on Black Friday for Christmas, we also do spiritual things to prepare ourselves for Christ. We are ready for the Christmas holiday, but we are not ready for an encounter with God. God longs for fellowship and intimacy with you and me. His heart beats for an encounter with you and me, but there are some things we must do. We have to prepare the way of the Lord. Make a highway in our hearts for the Lord to meet God. What are some good ideas to prepare the way of the Lord in our hearts, in this season of Advent? The prophet Isaiah has told us the way of the Lord. It is like a highway, a metaphor to help us understand preparing the way of the Lord.

When I first came to the United States 30 years ago I was impressed by the huge web of highways that are everywhere. It was a huge country and these highways showed me the great transportation system of this country. I could go anywhere, and all the companies could bring their products everywhere in the country so easily. People could be connected to every place and could move around where they needed to go. Highways save us time, and they are necessary for our lifestyles in this nation. These highways have helped this nation prosper. In the same way, spiritually, we also need a highway. Isaiah uses a spiritual metaphor of a highway as a means to relate and connect us to God and people those who are in isolated and excluded areas without any obstacles. V.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." To make a highway, a bulldozer moves the earth and fills the land and then levels it. In the same way, when we go to a dentist's office he drills on our teeth and makes a filling to fill the cavity and level our teeth so we can chew properly for our digestive health and good eating. Drilling, filling and leveling. These are important elements in dentistry and in constructing highways. On these good highways, people can drive their cars on the smooth roads. Let's focus on making good highways in our hearts to welcome Christ, our Lord.

The first step is that the mountains must be made low. Sometimes when we search our hearts deeply, we find there are mountains or high towers that need to be brought low. In these days every country has tried to outdo others by building the highest tower in the world: Shanghai in China, Singapore, Seoul, Korea, Tokyo in Japan, and Chicago, New York, etc. Then when the high place was finished, they could boast about it until someone else built a higher one. It shows lots of competition. The Tower of Babel was the first one mentioned in the Bible.

It was the people' s attempt to be great and reach God by their own competition and workmanship with their technology.

Genesis 11: 4 "They said, Come let us build for ourselves a city, and the tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name." They had the same frame of mind as we have today, to build up themselves so they could influence the world. People have always wanted to live in a superpower nation. As we enter the Advent season we must think about the things which hinder the welcoming of Christ. How can we make a level place to welcome Him? St. Augustine began to write "The City of God" when he saw the super power Rome Empire begin to fall after the attacks of the barbarians. We should have the mindset of St. Augustine and concentrate on the City of God where God reigns. What are the mountains in our lives, where we boast of self glorification or self satisfaction, disobedience and resistance to the Lord in some areas? Everyone has a mountain. But there is a time to cut it to a level place. The mountain must be made low in this season of Advent, to prepare the way of the Lord. This is the first step in making a highway in our hearts and in our society to prepare His way.

The second step in making a highway is a valley area that must be lifted up. V. 4 says, "Every valley shall be exalted ..." This means, raised up or lifted up. This is the same as the filling process at the dentist' s office. This is not an easy or comfortable process. Can you see yourself in the dentist' s chair and Dentist begins to drill on your tooth? Can you hear the sound of the drill after the area is numbed with a needle? Dentist must make it ready to be filled. It is not an easy process, but we have to go through it if our teeth will be changed to work better. It is the same when we deal with a valley in our hearts. A valley is a crevice, a very low place. Sometimes the valley is too deep and we hear the sound of echo from the valley, "I am sad, I am lonely, I am abandoned, I am afraid, I am hurt." These are the troubled places and wounded areas in our hearts. These areas are dark, empty, and lonely, hurting places that need to be raised up. Maybe some people are in a hiding place because of our hurt. Hurting people, because of their wounds, sometimes dig themselves into hiding places. Children, when they are abused, look for lonely places, dark places like a garage, or a cave. This is a valley where they can hide their wound. Some adults suffer from childhood abuse and seek for hiding places. These hiding places become valleys later if there is no healing moments. People try to escape like a fish in a tank that digs in the sand to escape poison. All the unhealthy survival mechanisms later on are destructive to themselves and those around them. When one is in a valley area, one cannot see the light. In the valley, they are isolated in a self prison, without hope and light, and they slowly die, physically and spiritually. This is a real description of the valley.

In order to prepare the way of the Lord in our valley areas, escape is not going to work to lift up. We need to have courage to go down these valleys with the light of Christ and look and touch the wounded areas deeply. There are many valley areas not only in our hearts but also in our societies, which we have to go down there for healing touch and preparing the highway of the Lord.

Thirdly, we have to make the crooked paths straight how often do you run along and then realize that your priorities are all out of whack? How often have you become overwhelmed by life only to realize that you're not headed in the direction you really wanted to go? If you could look down on the roads you've taken in life. You would find one curve after another as you've chased after this thing or that thing, slowly meandering toward something that you're not really certain of. There's only one solution for this problem, and that's to realize your purpose for your life. Sometimes we are pursuing this thing or that thing. We are spending our life following after that dream? We have to think: Is this God's purpose for my life? Is it the path God would have me to take? This Advent season is a good time to think about our calling from God, and God's purpose for us. As we make our way straight and forward let's prepare the way of the Lord.

Lastly make the rough places smooth. When the low places are built up and the high places brought down, the final part of preparing a highway is to grade and roll the rough and bumpy surface of the road to make it completely even and smooth. The uneven areas of our lives speak of the inconsistencies in our Christian living - the ups and downs, the hot and cold; the rough places where we still need further refining to make our lives smooth and straight. ARE YOU impatient, irritable, unfair or unkind in your dealings with others? These rough areas must be made smooth. It is the work of the Spirit in our lives to produce in us the consistent qualities of a Christ like character and behavior. But we must ask Him to deal with the impulsive reactions and replace them with the smooth responses of the Spirit-filled life. How level and smooth is the highway of your heart? How consistent are the marks of the Spirit filled life seen in you every day? Even though you must do your part, the Spirit within you can level the uneven places. So we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit among the pressures and problems of everyday life as we keep watching our self that wants to react impulsively and rise up.

As we enter into this Advent season, we are preparing our hearts to be on the right highway, and also we must lift up the lowly up into the arms of God and smooth out the rough ways between all of us. It is time to straighten out a highway in our wastelands and prepare the way for the coming of our lord.

