

So, I have a confession. I love a good musical and I will sing it loudly in the car. And I drive a lot during for my work with the hospice, so I've probably racked up more hours than even the busiest Broadway actor. Sometimes my husband and I will sing through our favorite musical in the car with assigned roles. Our current favorite is Epic the Musical about the Odyssey, so if you hear my daughter singing about Athena and Poseidon, that is why.

I blame this on my mother, who was a theater kid in high school and in particular worked on Godspell. Anyone here seen Godspell the musical? Basically, I would summarize it as a modern retelling of the Gospel. We watched the movie quite a bit as I was growing up. They say that most of us will see an image of Jesus at some point in our lives and sort of make that what we visualize as Jesus. For most of my life, the Jesus that I visualized was the Jesus from Godspell with the circus style, so it's really no wonder I ran away and joined the circus.

In the beginning of the movie, John the Baptist begins singing Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord in a busy New York City. Most people ignore him but a select few hear and follow John into central park and everyone is singing and dancing and having a grand ole time and eventually they find Jesus and immediately become his disciples. John is basically a compass that points the happy way to the savior.

The actual story is not as happy and joyous as the musical version, I'm afraid, but life never seems to be as happy as a musical. In reality, John's message was one of a coming joy, yes, but he was to do more than simply point to Jesus. He was to convict people of their sins, to call them to repentance. John pointed to Jesus the lion, not just Jesus the lamb. God would work great things, but that did not mean people could go on like before. The clutter within the heart had to be swept out, the sin had to be confronted. Only then could Jesus be fully embraced by the people.

So often we pray for God to work in our hearts and lives, but often we are hoping that work will come in a very narrow way. We want God to do the good things for us, but we don't want to have to change everything. Have you ever prayed for a relationship to be healed? Maybe you want things to go back to the way they were. But the way must be prepared for God's work in that situation. Maybe God is calling you both to change, to be more loving or more forgiving, before God heals the relationship. Otherwise, the

healing would be a false, half healing, and God loves us too much to let us have less than what is best for us.

Charles Dickens knew this principle well. Consider that old grump Scrooge from A Christmas Carol, that was miserly and cruel to everyone around him. Redemption does not come instantly; first the way is prepared by three ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future, forcing Scrooge to confront the parts of his heart that hold corruption and pain before healing and redemption can come. Preparing the way is not painless.

Consider Trinity as we pray for transformation, for growth to better fulfill our mission to go and teach, making disciples. Often when we pray this, what we really want is a jam-packed church and an overflowing plate with no change whatsoever. But before God works the way must be prepared, or else the healing will not be complete. If God flooded our church with visitors tomorrow, we might think all our problems are solved, but if the way hasn't been prepared, then the same old problems will repeat until we're right back where we started.

The way must first be prepared. That means some pain. It may mean confronting the dusty corners and looking under the rugs. It may mean the we have work to do, confronting our motivations, our desires, and our goals and aligning them more closely with our Lord Jesus. It may mean giving up things and patterns of being that we love, because they aren't good for us. This process may be painful. Not all will welcome the call of John anymore now than they did two thousand years ago. But to deny the call is to die.

As we focus this year on growing Trinity, on the great commission, on going and teaching and making disciples, of giving generously of our time and our resources, we may find that there are things we must confront. There may be things which God calls us to give up or to change before God blesses us with growth and new life. Someone new and weird may come and sit in the pews. That's okay. Once I was that new weird person, and now I'm not new but still weird. The music might change a little. You might be part of that change and it might be a little uncomfortable at first. You might have to invite people to church. I just stumbled across this fascinating statistic a friend shared and I shamelessly stole: As Americans make Christmas plans, 47% say they usually attend a church service during the holidays, according to a Lifeway Research survey. However,

56% of people not planning to attend say they'd be at church during Christmastime if someone they know invited them.

Preparing the way of the Lord may mean inviting people to church. We got three services the week of Christmas, the 22nd, the 24th, and the 25th. That's three opportunities to invite a friend to church. What's the worst they might say? No? Okay, well you're no worse off than you were before and maybe you just planted the first seed. Maybe they call you weird and disassociate from you. Oh well, lots of good people are weird and if they can't love you because of the single most important part of your eternal existence, your relationship with God, then they aren't really a very good friend. I have a slew of friends that are atheist, agnostic, Jewish, and so on. They know that I love Jesus, and I hope that they love Jesus someday, and we all get along just fine.

As we look forward to the future, let's remember that the way has to be prepared first, before lasting change and blessings can occur. That part isn't always easy. It's never easy to see our shortcomings. But the blessings to come are absolutely worth it. Come now, let us prepare the way of the Lord.

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