

Carol's Reflection – December 19, 2021

Prepare, prepare, prepare.

I think that we hear those words differently these days. It is a week before Christmas and there are lots of people who are preparing for gatherings of family and friends. There is getting the tree trimmed if you like to have a tree. There are people wrapping gifts that they have made, or maybe bought. There are people who are taking care of shopping for food, and then preparing it. There are those of us who are preparing to be hosted – do we need to bring something, or can we just relax and be taken care of?

There are all kinds of other preparations around us too. Teachers, administrators, support staff and students preparing for the holiday break. Some university students who are now preparing for more online learning in the New Year. There are people preparing for booster shots of their vaccines, making appointments, wondering what to do until they have them and the 2 weeks go by. There are medical people preparing for what might happen with omicron. There are all kinds of people in all kinds of places preparing.

And here we are, a week away from Christmas and the Gospel of Luke is telling us a story of preparation.

The Christmas story in Luke is not just about the birth of Jesus, as if that existed in a vacuum. The story begins with angels announcing another birth, that of John. Baby John will grow to be John the Baptizer. Baby John will be depicted in countless nativity pictures as a cherub like child with one finger pointing at Jesus – so that we are able to discern that Jesus is the way and the truth and the light.

The story begins with John, the child born of Elizabeth and Zechariah in their old age. The story begins with the community hearing the news as Zechariah – who is speechless from the time of the angels announcement – sings:

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.
By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

To prepare the way of the Lord is to give knowledge of God's love for everyone. Isn't that what your Christmas preparations might be about – to show those around you, or to

those you do not know but who need support – that they are loved? It's why we might make or buy gifts, or meals, or send cards, or make additional phone calls. It is why we donate to hampers or the Food Bank, or support outreach ministries. We do what we can, when we can, to share love.

The call to prepare the way of the Lord invites us to live as God calls us to Live. It is an invitation to focus our attention on making space in our lives for God's love. It is an invitation to remember that everyone is a loved – beloved – child of God.

That is true for our neighbours, it is true for the stranger, and it is true for ourselves.

And that takes us to the timeless words of the prophets – turn your lives toward God.

In Advent, we use the words of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. Ways to live as God's people.

In Micah, it is do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

Whatever words we relate to, they are intertwined. For example, we cannot have justice without hope, peace, joy, and love. And we cannot have Hope, without justice, kindness, and walking humbly with God. The same is true for Peace, and Joy, and Love. Each one is connected to the other.

And, each of us is connected to the other. Knowing all this is a part of how we prepare.

With prepare comes perceive.

Rick Steeves, travel writer and television host, was preparing for a busy season of European filming and visiting when the pandemic first took hold. When he could not do that for which he had prepared. He had to perceive a new way forward. He pivoted and learned some cooking skills. He called it a corona bonus.

He said: ***I always tell my tour groups, you know, if it's not to your liking, change your liking. And I've changed my liking.***

He went on to talk about how he was managing with yet another wave of virus and how it has taught him about patience.

It's a very good lesson I've had in the last year. There's more to life than increasing its speed. My life was so fast and so productive, and everything was exhilarating. And this last year, it's been walking dogs, playing the piano, enjoying every sunset like it's a devotional. And it's been a beautiful year for me.

We may not all have dogs to walk, we may not all play the piano, but we all can connect to enjoying every sunset like it's a devotional. Whether we are inside our homes, or outside, the sunset brings colours – the changing sky, and how we see everything else with that changing light. If we are outside, perhaps we can notice the sound of the

sunset, the birds that quiet, and the others that sing. Or perhaps we might notice the start of the smell of night. The freshness of the air at this time of year, or the summer scents as pollen floats by.

Perhaps that is a part of the call to perceive God's love all around us as we prepare. Perhaps we are called to enjoy every moment like it's a devotional. Perhaps we are called to notice, to attend, to be present.

By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.

We are guided in peace, and in hope, and joy and love.

We are God's Advent people – We are prepared and preparing. We are ready for anything – as the angels sing – Fear not!