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Luke 3:1-6
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One of the bedrooms in our house needs repainting.

- Ideally it should have been repainted before we moved in,
 - but we ran out of time before the day of the move,
 - so here we are four years later
 - and the room is still unpainted.
- The process of painting the room really wouldn't be that big of a deal.
 - It's not a huge room.
 - My guess is if we paint it blue again
 - and buy decent paint,
 - it will only take one coat. - -
 - The walls could easily be painted
 - in less than an hour.
- But if you've ever done any painting,
 - you know that painting a room -
 - and especially painting a bedroom that already has furniture in it -
 - requires more than simply grabbing a brush and paint - -
- No -
 - to do the job well,
 - I would need to move the furniture away from the walls,

- I'd need to cover the carpet,
- and tape up the trim
- around the windows
- and the door frames
- to mask the fact -
- that I'm not always the neatest painter in the world.-
- The painting itself -
- not much of a problem,
- but the preparation -
- to get to the point where I could actually paint -
- well for me- -
- that would require far more work -
- than the painting itself.- -
- Now as you might guess -
- with Christmas right around the corner -
- and the child who inhabits that bedroom
- coming home from college soon,
- I don't have the time
- or the energy to do all the preparation work needed -
- to paint the bedroom properly,
- but even though I won't be prepping to paint anytime soon -
- our reading from the Gospel of Luke - -

- reminds me that I as a follower of Jesus
 - I still have a great deal of prep work to do, -
- for as John the Baptist's ministry
 - and message demonstrates, -
 - there is important prep work
 - that to be done -
 - in our hearts and in the world -
 - before the coming of Jesus. - -
- Prepare the way of the Lord
 - that's the ministry John is doing with
 - the crowd of people
 - who have gathered around him in the wilderness -
 - looking for hope,
 - seeking a Messiah
- Prepare the way of the Lord
 - that's the message of John's ministry
 - to all of us
 - who gather together as followers of Jesus
 - as the body of Christ.
- Prepare the way -
 - for Jesus to come.
 - Make the path straight. -

- Unlock the doors that are closed -
- Smooth out the rough edges -
- to help clear a path
- for Jesus' mission to love, bless, and save the world-
- to move forward boldly into our hearts -
- into our communities -
- into the brokenness of our systems
- and relationships.
- Now to be sure -
- this close to Christmas
- It's easy to hear
- Prepare - -
- and think
- OK
- Christmas is coming
- so I need to decorate.
- I need to buy presents,
- to put up a Christmas tree -
- and get ready for Christmas morning, - -
- but John's call to prepare
- as you know,
- goes far beyond

- preparing for Christmas on December 25, 2021 - -
- John's call to prepare the way
 - is a much broader appeal
 - that encourages us to prepare both
 - for Christ's coming at Christmas
 - and for Christ's promised return someday - -
- And while
 - the crowd's gathered around John 2000 years ago
 - were clearly being instructed to repent and prepare
 - for ministry of Jesus which was about to begin in their community, - -
- for you and for me,
 - I think the call to prepare the way -
 - is an invitation -
 - to prepare ourselves for Jesus' coming
 - and to help prepare others to know God's love in their lives.

Now even though

- the words from Isaiah quoted in our reading from Luke
 - speak of preparing the way of the Lord
 - by making paths straight
 - by filling valleys
 - and making mountains low,
- the work John is describing doesn't necessarily require bulldozers and heavy equipment

- No - the preparation we are called to do
 - requires us to look first at our hearts,
 - to look at our lives, -
 - to consider our priorities, - -
 - and discover how our lives are shaped -
 - or could be shaped -
 - by Jesus' presence with us -
 - and not only that,
 - but to invest in our communities,
 - in building relationships,
 - and listening so we might hear
 - how we can accompany others
 - in preparing to encounter or experience
 - the transformational love of Jesus.
- And while neither John or Jesus -
 - provide us with a check list of 12 Steps to Prepare for Christ's coming, -

In our affirmation our baptism service,

- we lift up five areas of response to God's gift of love - -
 - that seem like a pretty helpful starting point for me -
 - as we think about how we can prepare ourselves -
 - and prepare the world around us to experience
 - the love of God in Jesus.

- If you don't remember those five promises and our response,
 - we ask -
 - 'Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in Holy Baptism:
 - to live among God's faithful people,
 - to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,
 - to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
 - to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,
 - and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?'
 - and we respond
 - 'I do and I ask God to help and guide me.' (ELW, pg. 236)
- As I said,
 - we don't have a check list,
 - but it seems to me that these promises is a pretty good place to start -
 - if we want to making the path straight in our hearts
 - and in our community for Jesus. -
- Think about it
 - as we live among God's faithful people,
 - as we intentionally gather with other Christians, digitally or in-person,
 - for fellowship, support and learning, - -
 - we prepare for Christ's coming
 - by connecting to the body of Christ more fully -
 - as we hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper

- as we gather for worship to give praise to God
 - and hear God's Word proclaimed
 - as we are fed and nourished by Christ's body and blood, - -
 - we prepare for Christ's coming
 - by experiencing
 - God's promise of forgiveness
 - and new life through Jesus
- as we proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed
 - as we share what we believe with others
 - as we allow our actions and our choices to be shaped by our faith
 - as we share our stories of faith with our neighbors and friends,
 - we prepare for Christ's coming
 - by opening the door for someone else -
 - to discover the hope and help that comes
 - through a relationship with God.
- as we serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus,
 - as we care for those who are sick or ill
 - as we show kindness and compassion, - -
 - as we invest our talents in resources in supporting God's mission,
 - we prepare for Christ's coming
 - by helping others to experience the good news
 - of God's saving love - -

- and as we strive for justice and peace in all the earth
 - as we walk with people whose voice is being drowned out
 - by oppression, racism, or greed.
 - as we amplify the voices of those who speak truth,
 - as we seek to find peaceful solutions to conflicts
 - as we pray for healing and wholeness
 - for the brokenness of the world,
 - we prepare for Christ's coming
 - by offering a glimpse of God's kingdom -
 - where all are equal in God's sight.
- Now as I like to remind people -
 - you won't be able to fulfill all five of these promises perfectly everyday -
 - so don't worry about being perfect,
 - strive for progress, not perfection,
 - and remember that each of us,
 - regardless of our faults or imperfections, -
 - has a part to play in this ministry John sets in motion - -
 - to prepare the way of the Lord.
- And to be sure,
 - the preparation John is calling us to do
 - will take a little work
 - it will take a little effort,

- but just as the work that goes into preparing to paint
 - a room -
 - will help yield beautiful results,
- so too will the preparation John is inviting us to do
 - yield beautiful results in our hearts and in the world,
 - for when we prepare for Christ's coming
 - by growing in our relationship with God
 - and by sharing the joy of God's love with others,
 - then we and all those around us -
 - can experience more fully
 - the hope and help that comes from -
 - knowing Jesus' love.