

Scripture: Luke 1:67-80

Sermon Title: "Prepare the Way"

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Throughout life, we all do our fair share of preparation. This time of year is filled with examples of just that: from getting your grocery store list ready to shop for your Christmas meal to decorating your home to get in the spirit of the season, we all are preparing. Now, of course, preparation is not something we do only around Christmas. Rather, it is a part of life overall and we all bring our own examples of how it fits into our lives. Preparing meals throughout the year, preparing for school, for work, for retirement, even simply preparing to leave the house in the morning. This time of year, especially with those rather chilly temperatures yesterday, I remember how my grandparents would prepare to leave the house. In addition to getting dressed warmly, making sure the cat had food and water, turning off lights and the television, and turning back the thermostat a few degrees, my grandfather would go outside early, maybe 15 minutes before they were actually ready to leave the house, and he would start the car and let it warm up, with the heat blasting, so that when you actually got in the car, it was almost sweltering.

This action had a twofold purpose. Initially, I was told it was so the car would run better – that this was the reason he went out to start the car and there was definitely truth in that. However, later I came to understand the other. It was an act of care and a symbol of love for my grandmother, making sure that she would have a warm car to sit in when they were finally ready to leave the house. I have even come to believe that this was the most important reason why he prepared the car in this way, because, as far as I can recall, he never warmed a car with such care and with such a time commitment for himself. If he was just going somewhere alone, I never saw him go out and turn on the car ahead of time. Sure, he may go out and sit in the car a minute or two, letting the engine warm slightly before shifting out of park and driving away. It was when my grandmother was riding along, that he took the time to prepare the car in this simple

and yet beautiful way. Every time in the winter months, when they would prepare to leave the house, whether to go to the supermarket, go to a doctor's appointment, or visit family, this ritual of a 15 minute preparation was there.

As we continue to journey through Advent, this season of waiting and preparing ourselves for the celebrations of Christmas and the gifts found in Jesus, we should take some time to think about this task of preparing. From our scripture reading today, we heard the words of Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, words spoken about what his son would do and how he would prepare the way for Jesus. How he would call people toward Jesus and get them ready for his arrival. Zechariah stresses how this work that his son will grow up to do connects all of their history as a people, as the descendants of Abraham, to all of their future, as the followers of Jesus. A pretty a big task, I would say to prepare the way for such a monumental occasion. A preparation that we remember and in which we join as we journey toward Christmas. Now, I'm going to jump ahead for a moment. Christmas comes, celebrations of Christ's birth abound, presents are opened, meals shared, and now our work is done, right? The thing that we have been preparing for has happened, so our task is complete, yes? Not at all. You see, this moment that we are preparing for, a moment that the descendants of Abraham had been preparing for now for many, many years, the arrival of Jesus is just the beginning. For, as we know, Jesus reminds us of the work to be done. How we prepare our hearts, our lives, our world to look more and more like the kingdom of God, ruled by God's love. This preparation that we are doing right now in this Advent season does not lead to a grand finale on Christmas Eve when we can say the work is done. Rather this preparation leads to, let's say, an intermission on Christmas Eve, when we take a break, celebrate, rejoice in the love that surrounds us: the love of God, of family, of friends, of neighbors. Then, the work continues as we strive to prepare the way of our hearts to love more and more like our God loves. To prepare the way for our lives to reflect more and more the life of Jesus. To prepare the way for our world to be better - with more hope and less fear, more peace and less war, more joy and less despair, more love and

less hate. The preparation continues. Our life as the People of God is all about preparing.

Too often, I think we miss the point of preparation. We seem to see the act of preparing as moving toward an end result, with the end result being the most important thing - being the climax of a moment or of a mission, which sounds right doesn't it? Still, Let me take you back to those cold mornings with a car warming up. A car which would carry my grandparents to their destination. Maybe to the store for groceries or to the doctor for a check-up. But these moments are not the end. For that food will need to be transformed into meals to feed a hungry family. That check-up will help sustain and prepare the body for the work yet to come. Those moments are not the end, but merely a stop along the journey. Our whole lives really are filled with actions of preparing. Because everything beforehand is connect to this very moment, and what we choose to do in this moment, will prepare us for the next.

Beloved People of God, may we see every moment as an act of preparing the way for something to come. Even the moments which seem like the goal or the conclusion, may we strive to see them as a part of readying for what comes next. Because, I believe when we do, when we see every part of life as connected to the past and impacting the future, well it changes how we will act in the present. Perhaps giving a little more thought, a little more care, or a little more love into the moments that lay before us. If you will go with me one more time back to those cold mornings and a car warming up. These moments certainly had a goal. A goal of getting to the destination of the day. A goal which would not have needed a car warmed up to be completed. But when we take the time to prepare, adding again a little more thought, care, and love into the moments that lay before us, well they make for a better future. Not only for a happy and warm grandmother on these trips out of the house, but for grandchildren who still remember and are inspired by the love and care put into those simple moments.

In this often busy time of journeying toward Christmas, may we all commit to putting a little extra thought, care, and love into these days of preparation. May we leave worry

of the perfect end result, the perfect Christmas behind, and make our best effort at a life committed to the preparation. After all, there is power in preparing well. So be it and may it be so. Amen.