

In Second Isaiah's word of comfort to God's people in exile are words of hope to those now carried off into Babylon. The route by which they got to Babylon was anything but straight. They had to go around waste lands, deserts, and mountains- it was a long and hard journey. The indignity of being a defeated people that were marched off down a long trek to a foreign land. Think about it for a moment what it would have meant. They were being forced out of the "Promised Land", the Capital city Jerusalem, the center of faith and dwelling place of God in the Temple although the Temple was destroyed. What has happened to their certainty? Where was their God? How will they ever recover from this? Can they ever be His favored people again? Now they live as "strangers in a strange land". Their reality has been shaken. To us, as people of faith, living in this post Christendom time, there is a loss of sense of certainty, a loss of sense of belonging, and values are all switched around. We too are "strangers in a strange land" or think about how our sin and rebellion put us in dry places. But there are words of hope. God is still in command. He still cares about them and us. This even in spite of what separates us from the good ole days which had the land flowing with milk and honey.

So here comes John calling for a straight way. No crooked way. A way to restoration. A time of renewal and redemption will come and it did in Jesus.

In second Peter we read about the community of God struggling with the wait of when will he come again and the fullness of the Kingdom to those of the faith be brought back to us. People who first believed are passing away-dying. What will happen to them? When will it happen? What will be the signs?

We as human beings and as believers have struggled with this throughout history. There have been those who predicted based on "their" interpretations and "decoding" of scripture and it has not come.

Waiting is a hard thing. And we have a lot of waiting experience. We wait in line. We wait at the doctor's office. We wait for a birth. We wait for our tax refund check. We know waiting. And we don't like it.

In Second Peter we are told in essence to quite trying to put God on our time table. God is not on our chronology. He is Lord over all. With the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like one day. God is in charge and “will come” “like a thief and everything that is done will be disclosed.” It will be his judgement not ours....a tough judgement but we are to be ready.

In the gospel Mark talks about a Royal Highway. Highways are remarkable undertakings. Land must be cleared, stumbling blocks and obstacles removed. Today we marvel at how they can cut highways through mountains, over deep valleys and chasms. It takes complex calculations and heavy equipment and explosives etc. to complete a highway.

Here the preparing is simpler. “Repent” turn one’s face to God. Redirect you actions, behaviors, attitudes to reflect God’s ways. That is why John came baptizing to wash away the old, to emphasize we aren’t okay and to repent.

Wait!! Maybe that is not so simple a solution. If we could just turn things around we wouldn’t need a savior. Struggle we do, and with our own egocentricity or “our way or the highway” theology and “our life experience means we know the truth” Our attitudes of judgements of others are “Of course” are correct and we all have our reasons to hold onto them.

Preparing for His coming means to really turn our whole sense of things toward God. It means to be receptive to receive his way of truth and life. It also means to replace our own self-assuredness about our way of truth and live and replace it with something new. That is why John came baptizing to wash away the old to emphasize we aren’t okay and to repent.

Getting ready for Christmas means not the presents or decorations and all of our wonderful traditions.

It’s to become receptive again to receive what this Christ is bringing to us. It’s to learn new ways of developing new attitudes and to become more open to receive our need for forgiveness. Our judgemental and unloving ways with others are to be put away and be made ready to be a part of Christ. Not easy. We want to receive his teachings, his way of interacting and understand his forgiveness for us

so that we can forgive others. His gift of the Holy Spirit, given to us at baptism, helps us to be receptive. God creates faith in us and he promotes changes within us. We just have to get out of the way-open our hearts and remove the obstacles. And He by the working of the Holy Spirit does that for those who truly want it.

Open your heart and mind. Make straight the highway. Turn again and receive what God wants to give you-a Savior. Amen