

In our collect this morning, we have the job description of a prophet:

- Preach repentance.
- Prepare the way of our salvation.

This is an interesting job description. Pretty low on details. It certainly wouldn't pass muster in today's world.

- No time expectations.
- No measurable deliverables.
- No listing of physical or mental requirements to either cover one's legal hind end and/or passively discriminate against people with disabilities.
- No mention of health insurance, pension payments, or continuing education.

The job description of a prophet is deceptively simple. Rolled up in the "simplicity" are a bunch of details that fail to be seen. In some ways, prophets are like event planners. I know. I used to do that for a living.

Event planners preach repentance all the time. It may not sound like repentance for sins, but that's the reality:

- "No, your budget won't support those audiovisuals."
- "Yes, you have to hire sign language interpreters."

- “Using recyclable flatware may cost a little more, but we need to do our part for the planet.”
- “We must be sure we are engaging a diverse line up of speakers.”

Event planners may not prepare the way for salvation, but we do a lot of work to ensure that community happens at every venue and every meeting. We plan for room set-ups: how and where to put tables and chairs, microphones, projectors, screens. We ensure that

- a person using a wheelchair can ascend to the dais;
- the food offered includes options for gluten-free, kosher, vegetarian, vegan, non-alcoholic, and diabetic diets that all taste good;
- the association president has the nicest room with lovely amenities; and let’s not forget
- each meeting room is at the perfect temperature for absolutely everybody.

The planner is on the floor before anyone else arrives and leaves after everyone else has gone back to their rooms. She eats standing up as the dishes are being taken away.

None of this is visible to the meeting attendees, unless (of course) you don't do them correctly. At that point, everyone becomes a critic. You take the criticism without saying a word. Then, you hide in the back of the kitchen so no one can see you lose it except the hotel staff. My heart goes out to the meeting planners who work for meeting planning associations. Talk about pressure.

But, down deep they love it. I did. They love making it possible to bring people together for a greater good.

In other words, being an event planner is perfect training for prophetic or ordained ministry. So, let's look at our friend John the Baptist from that perspective.

In John's culture, travel was over land. No need to worry about plane or train schedules. No one "Uber-ed" in first-century Palestine. Harbingers of the king's court would travel out to a city where the king wished to visit in order to assess the terrain. Then, every able-bodied person would begin to clear a path for the king to enter. It was important that the way was clear, not only of large obstacles,

but also of dishonest citizens. The roads prepared were festive and decorous. It took a lot of planning and work to execute this directive.

The king John the Baptist referred to was not a king his disciples would recognize. He, himself, probably didn't realize that the road he was preparing would lead directly into the River Jordan. In that river, a man of God would be declared THE man of God. But, that's next week's and January 13<sup>th</sup>'s story.

Today we hear from John the call to heed the words of the prophet Isaiah. Repent and Prepare. How shall we prepare?

Clear away whatever is in our hearts that prevent us from welcoming the king down a path to our souls. Turn away from activities that keep us from building this road. Erase any worship of the past so that we might welcome salvation that has come, will come, and is coming.

Banish any thought that this salvation comes only to us, individually, for it comes to the whole world. EVERY valley shall be lifted up. EVERY mountain shall be made low. Uneven Ground shall become level. Rough places will be plain.

No one should be able to say they were hampered in meeting the king. Salvation will be brought to all nations, not just the one of your origin. Salvation will be brought to all peoples: all colors, all abilities, all ages, all ...all...all.

Finally, take on the job of prophet as we are each called to do. Tell the story – sing out the Good News.

As Zechariah said:

You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High,  
For you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,  
To give his people knowledge of salvation  
By the forgiveness of their sins.

You can do it! There are no time expectations, no physical or mental requirements. Our Lord provides the deliverables. While there aren't any fringe benefits in the style of corporate America, the retirement benefits are out of this world. Amen.