

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." ²²Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

²³He said,

"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
'Make straight the way of the Lord,'"
as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" ²⁶John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

John 1:6-8, 19-28, 2014

In this Gospel passage there is a phrase that has unsettled me because I have never gotten a handle on what it looks like to,
“Make straight the way of the Lord.”

I don't think the Lord needs our help to make straight his way, or to find His way around whether it's in the city of Jerusalem, or Galilee, or Port Orange, or in your heart.
Jesus knows his way around.

John, in this gospel, just as Mark did in his if you remember the passage from last weekend,
connects John the Baptist to what Isaiah said in Chapter 40, verse 3:

“A voice cries out: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

And then goes on to say;
Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain.”

In this week's Isaiah reading we hear the promise of God to come and restore the people of Israel.

There are very vivid pictures painted in the poetic verses of Isaiah that describe what God's return will look like.

But, here is John the Baptist giving voice to the same words as he prepares the way for the coming of Jesus to the River Jordan where He will be baptized, prepared to carry out his ministry.

The people of John's day may have another image that may help them understand what John is saying about , "making straight the way of the Lord."

They live under Roman rule and had for many years by this time.

They were all too familiar with how the Roman army gained control of land they had set out to conquer.

The army would set out on their quest and they would cut a wide swath of devastation across the land destroying everything that got in their way.

They would burn houses, level towns and cities, kill anyone who resisted to prepare the way for the coming of a new government, a new ruler,
perhaps even a new god.

I think this brings us to a pretty clear understanding about what John the Baptists role was in his day.

"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord!"

Clear the path! Get everything else out of the way!

He was sent to shake up the status quo, to get people to clear away the clutter of their lives,

the things they thought were important to make way for the coming of Jesus for whom John is not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.

Jesus is coming, you don't know him yet, but he is here and you need to make way for Him.

John's testimony serves only one purpose, that all might believe through him.

That is what this lesson is saying to us still today.

Jesus is coming. Believe! Make way!

That announcement for us still holds the tension during this season between His coming as the infant born to Mary, and the risen Christ whose return has been promised on the day He comes to claim all that is His.

John is the voice preparing the way for Jesus.

But this is not the only place we hear the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, especially the wilderness of our day.

Are there any fans of the TV program "The Voice" here?

I will confess to being a fan. This season that is just about to announce a winner is the third season I have enjoyed.

I even record the shows to make sure I can watch them later if I have something else to do on the evening of their broadcast.

But, Last Monday night one of the contestants, Craig Wayne Boyde, who is a country rocker changed up style a little bit and sang a song that has never been one of my favorites:

The Old Rugged Cross

Of course what he did sounded more like the rendition by Alan Jackson than the way we would typically sing it on Sunday morning.

I listened to the words of that song and in them heard the message of today's gospel lesson. It is the refrain.

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,
Till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
And exchange it some day for a crown.

Till my trophies at last I lay down.

There is the housecleaning that John points us to.

Clearing out all of the things that get in the way of the Lord coming into our life, our home, our family, our hearts.

There is the call to clear away all the things we think are so important but really have little meaning in life

when you consider what God has done for us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The first phrase of the refrain says "I will **cherish** the old rugged cross," but you notice the third says,

I will **cling** to that old rugged cross,"

But I am here to tell you,

you can't cling to that old rugged cross until you put everything else down.

When you cling to that old rugged cross you won't just hold it in your hands, you will wrap your arms around it.

You will wrap your body, your mind, your heart and soul
around that cross
and you will hold on for dear life.

That cross may be old and rugged, it may not look like much,
but that cross will change your life forever.

What happened on that old rugged cross has saved your
life.

Another's life was exchanged for yours on the old
rugged cross.

Another one wore a crown of thorns on that old rugged cross so
you can exchange that cross for a crown of glory in the defeat of
death through Jesus Christ.

So, another place we hear John's message may even be on
Monday Night Prime Time TV.

After each one of the contestants sings their song the coaches
get the opportunity to make some comments.

When Craig had finished Parrell Williams, said to him,
"Man, Craig, I get it man, to God be the Glory."

Then he said this;

"Going through everything you have gone through to get
yourself here to this place I have a question for you.

What does it feel like to be at the top of your game and to
surrender it to God in front of the whole entire world?"

Can you imagine having that opportunity?

Or given the opportunity, taking it when you are on top of your game, when you are at your best, whatever it is?

What a profound question for a young man who probably until that moment had not given that any thought.

What a profound question from a young man who has accomplished as much as Pharrell has in his life to ask on Monday night prime time TV!

Pharrell Williams who is among many other things a musician in a wide variety of genre,

in these sweeping words clears the way for the Lord to come to the world in that moment.

To god be the glory!

For a moment Pharrell was John the Baptist, but he points out for us also that for a moment Craig Wayne Boyde was John the Baptist,

clearing away everything that gets in the way, putting down the trophies,

making room for our Lord to come,

and reminding us where Jesus comes from,

that old rugged cross where he hanged until he was dead.

I am not sure Craig got what had just happened or what he had just done. He was just trying to win the Voice,

ensure his career got off the ground, and be able to provide for his son Jacks.

But you don't ask the question Pharrell asked unless you know God.

Thanks to these two for their testimony,
 Testifying to the light so that all might believe through
 them
 whether they realized what they were doing or not.

I am not so unsettled with this phrase, "Make straight the way of the Lord." any longer.

I don't know if I like the song any better, time will tell.

But, this has helped me to first,
 better realize what this one phrase out of all the bible
 means for life and faith today,

 and secondly to recognize and hear the voices of our day
 that echo the voice of John the Baptist making straight the
 way for the coming of our Lord,
 even if it is just for a moment
 whether it is intended or not.

I get it man. To God be the glory.

Amen