



Mary and Bob often find themselves sharing common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry. When approaching ministerial concerns from different angles, *He Said - She Said* is a venue to share differing perspectives.

Prepare Ye the Way

Bob's Perspective:

As once again we stand at the beginning of the Season of Advent, we will undoubtedly hear Scripture readings and songs that will remind us to "Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight his paths." ([Mark 1:1-3](#)) Sometimes I have to remind myself that the timeline of John's voice crying out in the desert didn't come before the birth of Jesus, but rather, it prophetically announced the beginning of the Messiah's mission some thirty years later. However, if we take into consideration that the significance of the season of Christmas is not only to remember and give thanks for the Nativity, but just as importantly to prepare and anticipate Jesus' return in glory, then it all makes perfect sense.

So, the question of the day (in my mind) is, what does the 'prepare ye the way...' thing mean to us today? Exactly whose path are we straightening? Are we straightening our path to Jesus, or are we straightening Jesus' path to us?

In her office, Mary has a quotation hanging on the wall that says in effect that God doesn't choose the qualified, but God qualifies the chosen. That was certainly true during the time of Jesus' ministry. The Apostles were a very unlikely (and unqualified) group of candidates to become leaders of the most significant religious movement in world history – but it happened! I think that the same holds true in this day and age. The mere fact that we were brought into existence by our Lord (prequalified or otherwise) illustrates that he chose us – and constantly continues to do so. No one is here by accident. Every single person on this planet is part of God's divine plan. Although not everyone chooses to accept it, each of us has a purpose and a mission to fulfill. While not every purpose or mission will be famous or worldly notable – in their own way, each is very important and significant in the plan. Think of the model St. Paul illustrates in describing the Mystical Body of Christ. ([1 Corinthians 12:12-31](#))

The truth is that we're already in his heart – we need to let the Lord into ours. It's always our Lord who makes the first move. We receive his invitation, we receive his grace, and we receive his guidance. It's through this first move that we come to the consciousness of our need for him in our lives. In turn, we have the choice as to how we wish to respond. In essence, we choose whether we'll straighten his path into our hearts or not. However, even if for a time we choose unwisely, he'll never stop his pursuit of us. Our Lord's love for each of us has no limits – but unfortunately, we can't always say the same about our love for him.



What are the stumbling blocks or barriers in his path toward us? We may not have killed anyone or robbed a bank, or anything like that – but what about killing someone’s good reputation or robbing them of dignity? What about things like offering a daily moment of praise and thanksgiving for all the blessings in our lives? What about going the extra mile (especially when it’s inconvenient) for someone in need?

So, as we prepare for the coming of our celebration of the Nativity, will we work to straighten the path and open the doors of our hearts, or will we respond with, “sorry, there’s no room in the inn?”

Mary’s Perspective:

When one is immersed in a field of study or work, it tends to permeate other aspects of life beyond school or employment. Take, for example, an athlete competing on their first team in an organized sport. My daughter has recently joined the high school diving team – her first team sport – and not a day goes by without hearing about certain dive positions, sore muscles, coaches she admires, and so on. What she eats, when she sleeps, and her lifting schedule all impact the rest of the household. In another example, a friend and I were recently chatting about diocesan policy and rules, and we observed that often the language that is used can be imbued with canon law and “churchspeak,” such that it does not translate effectively to the secular world.

There are many times when I really appreciate the nuances and reflections that Bob brings to our partnership, and other times when I respect his “wise old owl” characteristics. And while this is certainly true of his Advent thoughts, I am beginning to fear that our *He Said-She Said* reflections are becoming so homiletic in nature that we risk being viewed as those weird church people who don’t live in the real world. So, in an effort to combat that perception, my Advent reflections are a little less “churchy” and a bit more hands-on.

Sidebar note – we actually had a spirited (very He Said-She Said) conversation about this. I posed that if we become preachy and immersed in spiritual writing, we alienate those who choose to read our blog because we’ve always been down to earth and relatable. Bob counters with the fact that we’ve been ministers our entire adult lives, our writing has always reflected our ministry (at least to some degree), and that the world needs more pastoral voices who focus on spiritual growth. Both lines of thinking have merit, and I suspect our writing will continue to reflect thoughts that are both relatable and homiletic.

Anyway, how can we “prepare the way of the Lord”?

1. **Find joy.** Literally, look for it each day. Make an effort to appreciate small acts of kindness, whether that’s a driver letting you merge onto the freeway or the person at the store holding the door for you. I’m pretty sure God intends for us to be happy and peaceful.



2. **Each day, do something that gives another joy.** Buy a friend coffee, compliment the pretty smile of the grocery clerk, or call a friend just to wish them a happy day. It doesn't have to cost money or a ton of time, but it improves both your day and theirs.
3. **Be grateful.** I am tremendously grateful for so many blessings in my life – a warm house, kind children, an awesome husband, friends that make me laugh, living in a city that has beautiful and visible changes of season, music that fills my days – and more. Make it a point to appreciate the big things, but also the little ones – like a warm cup of coffee on a chilly day, the smell of a freshly opened jar of peanut butter, and coming home to find someone else loaded the dishwasher. Gratitude and anger have a hard time coexisting in the same head.
4. **Minimize expectations.** *Currier and Ives* pictures are lovely, but real life is messy. Especially around the holidays, try to root yourself in the here-and-now, rather than in some idyllic hope. It would be lovely if everyone got along, there was plenty of merriment, and the perfect gifts were magically wrapped. More likely, you'll stub your toe trying to get a cup of coffee (only to find the houseguests finished the creamer), there will be an oopsie at the Amazon warehouse, and one string of lights on the Christmas tree will decide to randomly blink. If you need to be sad or mad for a bit, allow yourself a limited amount of wallowing – even tea kettles need to release the steam – and then find joy and gratitude in the mess of reality.
5. **Take the next best step.** The world can feel overwhelming at times, or even most of the time. Too many choices can paralyze our decision-making. Rather than allowing your head to spin and feel out of control, figure out what you can do right now to make life just a little better. Maybe that's choosing to do homework instead of watching television, or making a to-do list to organize tasks, or taking some time to do yoga and center yourself.

Yes, regular examination of conscience and good discipleship decisions are important, but they don't need to be constrained to the walls of your place of worship once a week. Perhaps this Advent, our best preparations are to realistically find joy, share joy, be grateful, and repeat. Simplistic? Maybe. Doable? Definitely. Preparing the way? You won't know for sure until you try!