

John stood in the middle of the desert,
raving like an Old Testament prophet.
 Going on about sin
 and repentance
 and about making way for God.

John stood out in the middle of the muddy river,
talking about getting washed clean
and about letting the light shine in the middle of you,
 no matter how bad it burns.

John stood out there doing what he had no business doing.
 Except it was the only work he could find.

 It was the only work worth his time.

What was John's work?

 Those folks from the temple came down to the river,
 and that's what they wanted to know.

 What exactly are you doing here?

 What kind of an operation are you running?

 “Well, I'm not the Messiah,
 if that's what you're after.

 Not Elijah either.

 And not the prophet
 come back down.”

Well then,
 just who are you?

“I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness:

“Make straight the way of the Lord.” That’s my work. That’s what I’m doing here. “Make straight the way of the Lord.”

People felt something holy when they saw John.

They felt like they were in the middle
of something that they didn’t even want to control.

So they walked right down to the edge of the water,
and they were up to their knees
before they even knew they were wet.

People felt something holy grabbing holt of them,
just about the time they felt themselves letting go.

And that’s what John was raving on about.

That’s what he was preaching to them.

“Make straight the way of the Lord.”

Make a way for the Lord.

Let go of what you’ve got in the way,
and let something holy grab a holt of you.

It’s the only way you’ll live.

It’s no surprise that we hear about John here in the middle of Advent.

Three candles lit,
two weeks to go until Christmas.

We're all trying to make room for God.
We're all trying to make a way for the Lord.
We're all trying to make sure we don't miss out
on the wonder
of the most wonderful time of the year.

Sometimes it's easy.
We find the perfect gift,
bought out of love
for someone we know will love it.

We spend a few hours with a cousin we haven't really seen in years.

We actually remember to give thanks
for all the wonder in the world.

Sometimes it's not so easy.
We feel compelled to be sure that everyone gets enough.

We're worried that our aunt still hasn't forgiven us
for what we said last year.

We wonder why this year,
we just don't seem to be as cheery as everyone else.

Sometimes it's easy.
Sometimes not so much.

But no matter what,
the work before us
is the same work that John was raving on about
all those years ago.

“Make straight the way of the Lord.”
Raise the valleys up
and bring the mountains low.
Make a highway for our God.

It’s no secret that we’re preparing for God.
That’s what Advent is all about.

We’re getting ready for a baby in a manger,
getting ready for God to be born into the world.

We’re also getting ready for the Kingdom,
for the Apocalypse of God.

The great Georgia preacher,
Fred Craddock,
has this to say about the 1st time that Jesus was born,
and about the 2nd time
that so many folks seem to look for.

He says,

*There is a world of difference
between saying that a Messiah will come
and saying that a messiah has already come.*

*It's a marvelously received message when you say,
"A messiah is coming,
because everybody wants to believe a Messiah will come.*

*But it's a different thing
when you say a Messiah has come.*

*When you say that the Messiah will come,
you can shape the Messiah into any form you want
and have him do everything you want
to make life perfect for you.*

*But to say the Messiah has come
is to get an assignment
as to how we're to live.*

That's not quite as welcome.

*I think really,
this is why some people prefer the 2nd coming to the 1st.*

The 1st gives us an assignment.

*The 2nd coming
is gonna really make everything like we really want it.*

This first coming of Jesus,
this Christmas we're getting ready for.
This thing that John is raving on about.

It means that we've got an assignment.

And our assignment is to make room for God.

Make straight the way of the Lord.

Knock down every mountain of shame you've built up.

Bring up every desolate valley in your heart.

And do it all
so that God can shine that light.

You've got to try to let that light shine in the middle of you,

no matter how bad it burns.