

REFLECTION

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***Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;
he will prepare your way. (Mark 1:1-8)***



Today's reading begins with the words of the Prophet Isaiah – *"Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way."*

If there was ever a year I wished God would send a messenger to guide me, this is certainly it. 2020 has been a challenge in all the wrong ways. Many straight paths have become twisted roads. Sometimes it feels like there aren't roads at all – and that I'm simply trekking through wilderness.

Like many, I feel lost. And while being lost is a scary feeling, maybe it's also the best place to begin finding ourselves. After all, today's story is not only about John the Baptist, but also about the people of Judea and the residents of Jerusalem who go out to him in the desert.

Those people left the cities behind to risk a journey into the wild – where instead of danger, they found baptism, reconciliation, and hope ("One mightier than I is coming..."). This model encourages me to make a similar "journey" through prayer these next few weeks – even if I do not physically get away from Washington, DC, where I currently live.

Looking back, my own service year in 2014-2015 felt very much like a journey into the wild – one which I am still processing. I can only imagine what this journey must feel like in 2020. For all those serving now, please take heart and know that this community of volunteers and alumni holds you close in prayer!

You are the people who have risked the journey. You are the people helping straighten twisted paths. You are loved and appreciated. Do not be afraid.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

This Advent season, many people are facing food insecurity. My service suggestion is to donate within your means to your local food bank or local food drives. If you are unable to drop off donations in person, there may be opportunities to give financially to churches and nonprofits who are organizing food runs and home deliveries during this pandemic. Consider searching online or asking your neighbors for leads on who is organizing!

Focus: COMMUNITY

John the Baptist's call to baptism and forgiveness of sin is not just about one person. It is about the whole community journeying and repenting together. Can you imagine what this would look like in our world today? It is hard to picture – but I can imagine it would be a joyful occasion. As individuals, we could celebrate our freedom and renewal of heart. As a community, we could clearly see and transform the biases and harmful dynamics that keep us from loving and valuing every person.

PRAYER

God, we give thanks for the clear paths and the broken ones. Help us navigate the roads ahead. Help us not to feel alone. Help us to love and nourish those who journey with us. And help us to extend love and kindness to the strangers we may meet along the way. To you we journey. Amen.

