

“Clean-Up Crew”  
“Company’s Coming” Advent Series  
Isaiah 40:1-11, Mark 1: 1-8  
December 6, 2020

The newly completed expansion of the Turner Turnpike from west Tulsa to Bristow is impressive. Have you seen it, or driven on it?

It’s 22 miles of six lane highway with tall light poles running down the median. The contractors working on the expansion for the Oklahoma Department of Transportation finished in two years (which was a little less than one year early), and it “ONLY” cost \$300,000 million.

But hey, it’s a smooth ride, *EVEN* at the new 80 mph speed limit.

Before any concrete could be poured, there was a tremendous amount of preliminary work that had to be done “to prepare the way.” Workers had to clear all obstacles in their way.

So the road crews used bulldozers, earth movers, and giant dump trucks to fill in the valleys and level the hills.

They chiseled or blew up any boulders in the way, moved tons of dirt, and built forms before they could begin actual construction.

The result is a beautiful, straight, level, and smooth highway... In a way it’s a metaphor for the road mentioned today in our scriptures from Isaiah and Mark.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God said, “I will send my messenger ahead of you to clear the way for you. Someone is shouting in the desert, ‘Get the road ready for the Lord; make a straight path for him to travel!’”

The messenger shouting in the desert is John the Baptizer. He makes his appearance in all four Gospel accounts at this time of year to remind us that we haven’t been paying close enough attention.

His story isn’t a side story. He is part of THE story, an important voice that calls us to make our hearts ready for the coming Messiah.

His shouts wake us up. His odd way of dressing captures our fascination. John storms up and down the riverbank, urging us to plunge into the cleansing water.

It may NOT seem like John is here to listen. Like a Road Construction Supervisor keeping his workers on schedule, he shouts out orders and directions...At first glance, it appears to be a one-way communication.

Except John IS asking for something from us. He is asking us to put on our hard hats and orange vests to join the road crew.

We've got streets to level and curves to straighten. John the Baptist speaks to each one of us on a personal level, asking us to clean up our own hearts and bodies.

He urges us to straighten out our behaviors.

But John also speaks to us as a community, and when he does that he calls us to make straight the pathways of injustice and racism. He tells us to seek justice.

There is work to be done! A response is required.

John wants us to participate in our own salvation because "company's coming" and the One who is coming never forces change on us. It has to become our own will, to do HIS will.

Well, if "company's coming," we'd better make the commitment to get busy because John is making it very clear that Jesus wants us to be His co-workers.

We talk about "walking in the footsteps of Jesus, and we sing "Onward Christian Soldiers," so is this strictly a matter of obedience and following orders?

Are we being ordered around by our Divine Construction Foreman to, "Get to work: Clean this up; take care of that; do this; don't do that; and on and on. That doesn't sound like a two-way street. Does it?

After all, this is the Lord's highway that we are straightening.

And, we all know it's the Lord's way or the highway! Right?

Let's not jump to that conclusion so soon. It isn't really that way, according to Isaiah.

We have to get the whole picture, because this conversation of hope and transformation that takes place between God and God's people began long before John and Jesus.

Listen to what Isaiah has to say:

“Comfort my people,” says our God. “Comfort them! Encourage the people of Jerusalem. Tell them they have suffered long enough and their sins are now forgiven. I have punished them in full for all their sins.” (Isa. 40:1-2 GNB)

(Continuing the 40th Chapter in verses 9-11)

Jerusalem, go up on a high mountain and proclaim the good news! Call out with a loud voice, Zion; announce the good news! Speak out and do not be afraid. Tell the towns of Judah that their God is coming! The Sovereign LORD is coming to rule with power, bringing with him the people he has rescued. He will take care of his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs together and carry them in his arms; he will gently lead their mothers.” (Isa. 40:9-11 GNB)

Did I mention that “Company's Coming”?

The Lord heard the cries of the people, and now answers back with a response. God has listened and now speaks, and the Word that God speaks is Jesus!

“Jesus.”

To be clear, that wasn't the word that the first audience of Isaiah's words heard.

The word they heard was “home.”

The people of God were in exile. Babylon had destroyed Jerusalem and took its loot and its leaders into captivity.

They were in exile. They were separated from the land that God had promised to them, and far from home.

So, God's people felt alone. They felt like they had been punished and then left alone. Everything they held dear had been taken from them.

All this happened because God felt the need to redirect the peoples' focus. Many of the things that the people had elevated to importance, came between them and God. Their society and religious leaders had begun to cater to power, influence, and wealth. So God took it all away from them.

They had conveniently forgotten to take care of the widows and orphans, anyone living on the margins, barely getting by.

The rich had been getting richer, and the poor were getting poorer.

Good grief, what was going on in Jerusalem 3,000 years ago sounds an awful lot like what's going on in this country now! I told you weren't ready for company!

Before houses began to be designed and built with open floor plans, the rooms were more segmented for different uses.

In the house I grew up in we had a family room family room, and we also have a "Living Room" that was rarely used.

But there wasn't a lot of "living" going on in the "Living Room," That room wasn't really named properly. It was more of the "Visit Room" than the "Living Room."

So, the "Living Room" is part of the house, but it really wasn't the life of the house. It wasn't where we live. Most people live in their family room, or even in the kitchen.

It's pretty rare that we live in those specially decorated rooms with the nicer furniture.

They're in our homes but they're reserved for guests.

We are facing a health crisis, a social crisis, and a spiritual crisis these days. For too many people, God is in the house, but He's been relegated to the room in our house that's reserved for special occasions.

It's like we say, "Lord God, I prepared that living room especially for You. Isn't it pretty? So I'd like you to stay in there. Please don't come in my family room, this is where I live MY life."

It's such a shame when we don't make the commitment to allow God in the center of our lives, and try to keep Him in designated areas. Unfortunately, many Christians say that God is the centerpiece of their lives when He really isn't.

God's people had been in Babylonian exile for years. During that time they didn't have the Jerusalem Temple to worship in, so they turned to God's written Word.

Guess what happened. They re-discovered their faith through the written Word. They developed a new understanding of their relationship with the Lord, and felt re-connected to the lifeline, the connection that they had longed for.

"Can you hear me now?" the Lord might have asked.

The thing is, it seems like we're able to hear God's voice the clearest, when we've been pulled out of our comfort zone.

It's when we've been stripped of everything that is familiar, and the things that we think give us security, that we come to realize that all we have to rely on is God.

That's what happened to the children of Israel. They lost everything, and as a result they gained back the most important thing in life. They made the commitment to bring the One True God back into the center of their lives.

So, they cried out. And God heard. And God announced, "Clear the road home through the wilderness of any obstacles! Make it level and straight! And the He brought them home.

It may not have been exactly the home they envisioned. A lot had changed over the years that they had been away.

But isn't that the way it always is? When we go on a life journey, God usually doesn't return us to the same old messy environment we lived in before.

Instead of what WE envisioned, the Lord brings us home to the place HE has envisioned for us.

I'm speaking of the home where we find Jesus. The child in the manger, and the Savior on the Crosses where our real home is.

Home is where we are loved, and healed, and heard.

The Silent Night gives us the opportunity to shut out all the distracting noise of the world, so that we can hear the voice of the One who deserves to be at the center of our lives.

Can you hear it? The voice of the herald that sounds like thunder rolling across the desert floor. It's the voice proclaiming Good News. "Company's coming! Prepare the way!" he bellows.

It's our responsibility to be listening, and to respond. Company's coming, and so we need to make ready. It's time to make ourselves ready.

It's time to make our world ready for the One who wWILL come at the Final Trumpet to take us home.

Once all the dirt was moved, the concrete poured, sod was laid, and equipment taken away at the completion of the Turner Turnpike expansion between here and Bristow, there was still work to get done.

That's when the clean-up crew came in with machines that have spinning brushes, blowers, and lots of workers pushing brooms. That and painting the lane dividers was the final process in making the highway smooth, flat, and straight.

The joy for those who know company is coming is that they get to be on the clean-up crew. We want to be ready.

Let's get to work; company's coming!