

**ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA**

December 5, 2021 – ADVENT 2, YR. C

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Sermon: “*Repare the WAY of the Lord!*”

Malachi 3:1-4	(A prophecy of the coming Savior, and His forerunner.)
Canticle 16	(Praise for the coming of the herald of the Messiah—John the Baptist)
Philippians 1:3-11	(A prayer for believers to remain blameless until Christ returns)
St. Luke 3:1-6	(St. John prepares the way for Jesus, the Savior)

This time of year, we all like walking into a nice, clean, warm, well-appointed church. We find such spaces comforting, particularly as the weather becomes harsher. My last winter in upstate New York, I met with my Franciscan brothers and sisters at St. James’ Church, Oneonta, which is just such a pleasant, well-lit, beautifully decorated place. St. James’ secretary, Sally, was particularly talented at creating seasonal bulletin boards. She had made a beautiful one for Advent. But strangely, instead of reading “Prepare ye the way of the Lord!”—John the Baptist’s famous cry that we hear this Sunday—it read, “repare ye the way of the Lord!”

Father Ken Hunter, the Rector, later found the “P” on the floor. Oh, I should say, he found *the letter* “P” on the floor. For some reason, it refused to adhere to the board. However, the revised statement got him thinking about something he shared with us: God has *already* prepared the way for Jesus. After all, Christ has already come among us. So perhaps it’s not our job to “prepare the way of the Lord,” but to “repare the way of the Lord.” I know, it’s not spelled right, but you get the idea.

You can understand this even better if you think of the potholes, cracked asphalt, and ruts on West King’s Highway, right near our church. This road has already been prepared, that is, constructed, paved—and hopefully, pre-treated for ice and snow—so that we can get to and from St. John’s, and other destinations. But if our highways and village streets are not kept *repaired*, we might not be able to get *anywhere*, thanks to axel-breaking potholes, split-open pavement, and poor drainage that can cause flooding.

So, how do we “repair” the way of the Lord? I believe that during Advent, God is calling us to be “ODD” people. Okay, I realize some of us already fit that bill. In fact, every one of us would probably turn out to be a bit strange or a little weird, if people actually got to *know* us.¹

But what God wants from us is “O”—to be open to His call upon our lives, as John the Baptist was open to his vocation of leading people to repentance and to Jesus. We increase our openness toward God through the prayerful self-examination which is characteristic of the Advent season. You may find yourself drawing much closer to the Lord after you repeat many times what is known as “The Jesus Prayer”: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” [Let’s say it together.]

The second thing God wants from us is “D”—discipline, spiritual discipline. Are you reading the Bible regularly? Have you ever tried saying the Daily Office, Morning or Evening Prayer, daily? Do you intercede for your Secret Prayer Partner often? Are you receiving Communion every Sunday?

We don’t practice spiritual disciplines because we are already spiritually fit. We do them in order to *become* the kind of people Jesus wants us to be. It’s like an athlete who lifts weights, runs, and does other exercises in order to play a better game. The pushups aren’t the game itself, but they improve that person’s chances of winning.

Spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, prayer, and receiving the Blessed Sacrament help us to “repair” the way of the Lord so that we can do the first thing—be open to the voice of Christ guiding, helping, leading, and gently convicting us. In this way, Jesus can begin to make us more like Himself.

The third thing God wants from us is the other “D”—devotion. Sticking with God even through the tough times. Let’s face it, we don’t always feel as though God is listening to us, paying attention, or maybe, even caring about us. There are days, weeks, or even months, when we go through a period of spiritual dryness. Those are the times when the potholes open up, the cement cracks, the asphalt buckles, and we feel incapable of repairing the way for the Lord to come to us once more.

But if we hang in there, if we maintain our spiritual disciplines, and we stubbornly commit to trusting God whether or not we sense His presence, that dedication, that devotion, will “repair” the way of the Lord. He will travel the path with us once more, in a richly tangible way.

John the Baptist was definitely “odd”—as in strange, weird, peculiar, out of the ordinary, and unusual. But the prophet was also “ODD”—open to Jesus, disciplined, and devoted. Being “ODD” in this way helped St. John to “repair” the way of the Lord, that is, make it freshly paved and newly graded, so that Jesus could come to those who needed Him most.

We, too, are called to imitate St. John in this way, clearing away any obstacles that might prevent those around us from receiving Christ into their lives. Such obstacles might include unforgiveness, bitterness, gossip, jealousy, or slippery ethics. If others see unchristian behavior in us, they are more likely to put up a “road closed” sign, when it comes to Jesus traveling their way.

In addition to being the Second Sunday of Advent, today is also the eve of the Feast of St. Nicholas, the fourth-century Bishop of Myra, in Asia Minor. He gave away all his inherited wealth and traveled the countryside doing the work of Christ in caring for the poor and ministering to the sick. No doubt, it was considered rather “odd” for a prince of the church to hang out with paupers. And, for his good works, he was imprisoned and tortured during the Roman Emperor Diocletian’s reign of terror.²

In observance of his day, I would like to close with the collect for that commemoration:

“Almighty God, in Your love, You gave Your servant Nicholas of Myra, a perpetual name for deeds of kindness both on land and sea: Grant, we pray, that Your Church may never cease to work for the happiness of children, the safety of sailors, the relief of the poor, and the help of those tossed by the tempests of doubt or grief; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*”

Dear friends, in the spirit of both John the Baptist and St. Nicholas of Myra—both definitely “ODD” persons of faith—let us go forth into the world, and “repare the way of the Lord” through all that we think, say, and do.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit+,

Amen.

¹ Adapt. Kenneth Hunter, St. James’ Episcopal Church, Oneonta, NY, 5 December 2015. Used with permission.

² *Holy Women, Holy Men: Celebrating the Saints* (New York: Church Publishing, 2010), pp. 104-105