

Focusing In . . . December 2011

A voice cries out; “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” Isaiah 40: 3 (NRSV)

Understanding and interpreting Hebrew is tricky even for the experts because it does not use vowels or punctuation marks. So translators have to make the best sense of it as they add their quotations and commas and exclamation marks. In Mark 1, the voice is crying out from the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord”. In Isaiah 40, however, the voice is to cry out, “In the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord”.

In this, I heard a new thing: The prophet is called to preach to the people a word of comfort to those in exile; those living in a foreign land. The prophet is to say to the people, “In the wilderness – in the times of struggle and difficulty – in those dry and barren times, that is when you must prepare because God will certainly come”. Not simply as a prediction of the ministry of John the Baptist, instead I heard a word for my heart – that it is precisely when I feel the most alienated from God and lost, wandering in some wilderness of despair – that is when God will come. He WILL COME! Not a maybe – not a faint hope, but an absolute promise!

The prophet argues with God: “Why should I tell the people this news – they are as fickle as grass and steadfast as a flower! Even in exile, they are not faithful to you, so why should I comfort them with a word of promise? Why, would you come to them?”

God responds in verse 8, “Yes, the grass withers and the flower fades, but my Word will stand forever . . . so get up on a high mountain and bring good tidings and say . . . Here is your God!” Basically God is saying, it isn’t about the people and whether they are true and faithful or not, it is about me and MY word and MY steadfast love and MY plans for them. The Glory of the Lord WILL be revealed and ALL PEOPLE (all flesh) SHALL see it together!!! It is what God wants and so it is what God will make happen.

Our world is so arrogant to think that it can shut out God from its business and create its own destiny. The Word of the Advent season speaks this to me: “Look out! God is coming” so prepare yourself! For some, it is a word of comfort but for others it leaves them quaking in their boots! As you read the rest of Isaiah 40, notice how big God is, compared with the world and allow that perspective to sink in. Let us not so much prepare for a babe as for this Mighty God to come with fear and trembling. But with this God also comes incredible hope, for his kingdom will come and his will be done. Halleluiah!

By grace alone,

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