



*adapted from Rachel Held Evans*

*Advent is a season of anticipation, of holy waiting. It is a waiting characterized not by idleness or even contented peace, but by prophetic yieldedness and active hope. Perhaps more than any other season in the Christian calendar, Advent acknowledges the already-and-not-yet nature of the Kingdom of God. In remembering the anticipation of Christ's first coming, we acknowledge and nurture our anticipation of Christ's second coming. Advent is a season for the prophets, for the dreamers, for the poets. A great light has shown, but there is still so much darkness to pierce, so much gloom to overcome.*

*How have you slowed down & embraced Advent so far? How has that been shaping you?*

### **Isaiah 40:1-11**

*"Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep."*

## **During Advent, we talk a lot about preparing for Jesus.**

We talk about preparing our hearts with prayer and contemplation, preparing our homes with tinsel and trees, preparing our churches with pageants and carols and candles.

But what does it mean to prepare our world for the Incarnation? What does it mean to pave a way for God through a planet groaning from exploitation, through societies plagued by inequity, through religious and political systems corrupted by power and privilege? What does it mean to make a path for God through the streets of Ferguson, down the halls of power, across the bridges of New York City, down the aisles of our great cathedrals, through the slums of Mumbai?

**If paying attention to the prophets aligns our dreams with the dreams of God and drives us to prophetic action, then the cries of Isaiah today are a reminder that sometimes this means getting in the demolition business. Sometimes this means flattening the mountains of privilege and power, clearing away the obstructions of legalism, and leveling the uneven ground of racial, economic, and religious inequity.** After all, the sages have long told us that there is a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to mend and a time to rend, a time to build and a time to tear down.

Maybe this Advent season should be a season of rending and uprooting, of tearing down and leveling the ground. **Maybe this year we prepare for Jesus not simply by hanging up wreaths but by pulling down the broken, unjust systems that tend to obscure God's presence among us by obscuring God's image in our brothers and sisters. Maybe we prepare for God-with-us by marching with the protestors rather than watching TV, by "shutting it down" rather than lightning it up.**

The prophets sparked the imaginations and directed the actions of Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah, Simeon, and the John the Baptist who spoke of a God who topples rulers from their thrones and lifts up the poor, who scatters the proud and unites the humble. For John, the call of the prophets had practical implications, implications that cost him his reputation, his comforts, and eventually his life.

The miracle child of Elizabeth and Zechariah, John was probably expected to follow in the footsteps of his father and become a Temple priest—a position of some power and prestige. But John didn't stay at the Temple among the ceremonial baths. John went out to the rivers, to the desert, to the people. Calling them to a single, dramatic baptism to symbolize a reoriented heart, he declared that “every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

“Prepare the way of the Lord,” he told the people, “make his paths straight.”

In other words: God's on the move. No mountain or hill, no ideology or ritual or requirement or law, can obstruct Him any longer. Temples cannot contain a God who flattens mountains, ceremonial baths a God who flows through rivers. A mighty and unjust Empire cannot withstand a God who levels the hills of inequity, who regards the powerful elite as withering grass, who raises up the humble and puts the powerful in their place.

**Repentance, then, means reorienting around God's priorities. It means leaving the old ways of obstruction and supremacy behind and joining in the great paving-of-the-path, the making-of-the-way, the demolishing of every man-made impediment between God and God's people so the whole earth can celebrate God' uninhibited presence within it and welcome the arrival of the Messiah.**

We cannot see Immanuel, God with us, if we cannot see God's image in our black brothers or our lesbian sisters. We cannot make way for baby Jesus in the manger if we cannot make way in our lives and our churches for the poor, the uneducated, the immigrants, and the marginalized. We cannot grasp God's eternal, everywhere Word so long as we believe that political power and religious prestige are anything but temporal blades of grass that wither in the winter. We cannot hear the voice crying from the wilderness if we stay shut up in our castles, hidden in our temples.

**If you want to be a part of God's work in the world, then help prepare the way. Level the uneven ground.**

**The promise of Advent is God is on the move.**

**The challenge of Advent is to move with Him.**

**I wish I knew where to start.**

*What does it mean to reorient our lives around God's priorities?*

*Where do you see God on the move in and around you? How can you move with Him?*