**Make Straight the Way of the Lord**

Based on [John 1:19-28](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn1.19-28)

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Fourth Sunday in Advent ~ *Rorate Coeli*

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This gospel is about the role of John the Baptizer. It also keeps perspective of all true prophets, preachers, confessors, and believers. The role of every evangelist is to point to Jesus Christ, the messiah, and not preach himself.

There is a famous painting of Martin Luther, you may have seen it on our website. He standing in an elevated pulpit, opposite a congregation of people with Jesus on a cross crucified in between them. Luther is pointing at Christ. Martin Luther is supposedly preaching, but his mouth is closed. His preaching from the pulpit consists entirely at pointing at the crucified Christ.

That is the task of preaching, and evangelizing is to direct people—(you, even you who know Christ)--to Christ on the cross…*back* to Christ on the Cross…who died for your sins. To be sure, much follows this, but this is primary, central. Without Christ Crucified, I have nothing…with him I have everything, even though he continues to give me more than I ask, should I die only having him, my joy will be full.

There is a real phenomenon today of celebrity pastors. They are pastors of mega churches, and their ministry is interesting in this way. Their sermons are preached in one location and broadcast via jumbotron to other satellite campuses. Can it be that there’s not enough men to ordain, who can take up the mantle and preach for these different locations? Of course not, unless the man is part of the message. The church that is dependent upon a single pastor’s preaching is preaching a persona, rather than a message. Rather than making straight the way to the Lord, the celebrity pastor becomes the way.

You may contrast this with the humility of John’s ministry. John doesn’t elevate himself; he does not preach of himself, but of another to come. They ask him, and John answers flatly. I am not Elijah. I am not the prophet, I am not Christ. John says I am a voice crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord.” Though he is a strong preacher of repentance, his message is not about him. He doesn’t say “Come to me”, he simply says “repent”.

There is another false messenger of Christ that is evident in today’s gospel. It is the consensus of influential men that places itself above Christ. The Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask John, “Who are you?”…”We need to give an answer to those who sent us.” Why are you baptizing if you are neither Elijah, the prophet or the Christ.?” They are the religious authorities, and it is implied that nobody should be baptizing without their authorization. They are like the Roman Catholic magesterium, a group of men who claim that they alone make priests and churches. Rather than making straight the way to the Lord, they too become the way. And when they become the way, they get in the way.

In addition to personality pastors, and magesteriums, there is another error of churches that makes crooked the way of the Lord. Church programs. I don’t mean bible studies. For decades now, most churches have been concerned about declining attendance. A popular reason people would give for not coming to church was that they were too busy. So the solution offered by some is to have more programs and social events for people to go to.

If people really are “too busy” to remember the Sabbath day, it takes a special kind of blindness to think that scheduling more “church events” is going to help busy people reconnect with the church.

If people are too busy to keep the third commandment, then it is because they lack true fear and love of the Lord. They don’t need programs, events or anything like that. They need the way made straight, and that won’t happen at church bowling night. They need to heed the call to repentance, which is to clear away the accumulation of idols, so that the way to the Lord is straight.

John’s idea of ministry is Spartan by comparison. His robe of camel’s hair and diet of locusts and wild honey communicate a sort of minimalism. No personas, no magesteriums, no church programs. John’s preaching is one of repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Wash away the idols; set your mind on things above.

It is supremely ironic and devilish that, Advent--the time when we are supposed to clear the worldly clutter from our hearts and so make straight the way of the Lord,--is the greatest shopping month of the year. We are supposed to detach ourselves from worldly entanglements; instead we go shopping in order to bury our each other in them. We are supposed to quietly and prayerfully await the celebration of Christ’s birth; instead Advent is the busiest time of the year.

Remember, the straight way to the Lord is through repentance and faith. This is the straight and narrow way that leads to eternal life. And though Christ has ascended and we prepare for his coming on the last day, he still comes to us, under bread and wine, to give us his life. The way to the Lord’s Table is repentance and faith. The Lord’s Supper is Christ for you, and the path is straight.