

TEXT: Matthew 3:1-12
THEME: Preparing the way
SUBJECT: Trustworthy lives
TITLE: Making God Credible

Second Sunday of Advent
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Messiah Moravian
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What have we done? What have we done by accepting the obligation to love and nurture Charlotte and Madeline in Christ? What we have done is promise to prepare the way of God into their lives, to assume responsibility for making God credible. What have we done?

The Bible has no argument for the existence of God. The Bible gives us story after story of people like you and me who know moments of conflict with God, anger with God, doubt about God's purposes, anguish and lostness when no real sense of God's presence is known. The Bible speaks of comfort and reassurance in the life of faith, but also knows the appalling cost of letting God come near.

For John the Baptist the price of the advent of God is repentance. Repentance, for John, is more about preparing for the future than letting go of the past. Repentance is about clearing away the roadblocks we have erected to keep God at a safe distance.

The first roadblock arises from a failure to act in accordance with what we say we believe. John has no patience for piety absent justice. The second roadblock arises from the presumption of privilege, from a sense of entitlement. John has no truck with blue-bloods absent humble service.

John is not trying to prove God's existence, but challenging the nature of our existence. It is our way of living, not God's being, that is called into question. For John, God isn't some cosy made-up way of making yourself feel better. God is a fire who eternally consumes what is worthless, while preserving what is valuable.

Etty Hillesum was a young Jewish woman in her twenties when the Germans occupied Holland. She was not a pious or conventional person at all, not someone with an explicit religious commitment. Her passion, her bohemian energy and indiscretion and the slow and surprising character of her journey towards God speaks to those who find themselves outliers in relation to institutional religion.

Her published diaries and letters from 1941 to 1943 show how, during this terrible period in the history of her country and her people, she became more and more conscious of God's hand on her life, at a time when most would have been likely to feel more deeply skeptical about God.

She was imprisoned in a transit camp at Westerbork, before being shipped off to Auschwitz, where she was to die in the gas chambers in November of 1943 at the age of twenty-nine. Of her experience she wrote, "there must be someone to live through it all and bear witness to the fact that God lived, even in these times. And why should I not be that witness?"

In a letter to a friend from Westerbork, she described her life as having become “an uninterrupted dialogue with God.” She sensed that her vocation in the camp was to prepare the way for the advent of God into the hearts of others. Etty, without any sense of being exceptionally holy or virtuous, simply agreed to take responsibility for God’s believability.

We are not confined in a transit camp, but we are living through a transition from familiar, known ways of being and doing into what . . .? We don’t know. The pace of this transition, the uncertainties it creates, the fear it induces, has us all on edge. The circumstances of our lives at this moment in time do not make for easy faith. We know doubt and inner anguish.

Yet, we have promised to love and nurture our children *in Christ*. Parents desire to love and nurture their children, but we have promised to love and nurture them *in Christ*, to prepare the way for the advent of God into their lives, to make God credible. How can we do this given all our doubts and fears? It would be much easier to succumb to skepticism.

Rowan Williams offers reassurance. People like Etty are more like us than not. They too are often anguished or struggling. Yet, the way they live gives us confidence. In our better moments we can imagine ourselves living with their courage. Faith has a lot to do with the simple fact that there are trustworthy lives to be seen, that we can see in some believing people a world we’d like to inhabit.

On Sunday morning, September 20, 1942 at 10:00 am, Etty Hillesum recorded this prayer: “How can I thank You, oh God, for all the good You keep showering upon me. For all the friendship, for the many fruitful thoughts, for the great all-embracing love I feel within me and what I am able to apply at every step. Sometimes I almost believe that it is too much, and then I cannot tell how I shall ever do justice to it. But it is just as if, thanks to that great love, everything one does bears fruit.”

We are confronted with an unavoidable choice. It’s a choice that might be helped by intellectual discussion but is seldom, if ever, settled by it. It is a choice facilitated by trustworthy lives which create in us a desire to live in their world, a desire to know what they know and to drink from the same wells.

We have promised to live trustworthy lives so Charlotte and Madeline, Elias, Ellie, Aidan and Olivia, Nora and Dayton, Nathan, Aaron and Lilly, Blythe and Emery, Dean, Maggie and Heath, Katie, Maxine, John and Will, Perry and Davis, Palmer, Thomas and Catherine, Lucas and Nora, Brooke and Meredith, will know a great love, a love that bears fruit in everything they do.