Preparers of the way of light
John 1: 6-8, 19-28
Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11
Rev. Sharon

I cannot tell you how the light comes.
But that it does. That it will.
May we turn ourselves toward it.
May we open to the light…

We prepare for the way of light. The way of Christ.

How do we prepare for the way of the light of Christ?

From the Gospel according to John, we read of John the Baptist, a classic exampler of preparation.

And in our text today, we witness this preparer of the light of Christ, describing what he is not and pointing to something beyond himself.

When we think of John's gospel, we often thing of Jesus' "I am statements". (I am the bread of life, I am the resurrection" "I am the way"
Well John the Baptist in this passage is giving us "I am not" statements…

I am not the light
I am not the Messiah
I am not Elijah
I am not a prophet
The one who is coming - I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.

Well who are you:
I am a voice crying out – Make straight the way of the Lord
Prepare the way of the Lord.

I am the pointing to Christ – I am pointing to the light.

John knows who he is and who he isn't.

John is not the baptist here **but the witness (a sign, a finger pointing, or a life demonstrating)**

The story is told of Rabbi Zusya, an 18th century Polish rabbi, much revered for his wisdom.

One day he stood before his congregation and he said, “When I die and have to present myself before the celestial tribunal, they will not ask me, ‘Zusya, why were you not Moses?’ because I would say, ‘Moses was a prophet and I am not.’

They would not say, ‘Zusya, why were you not Jeremiah?’ for I would say, ‘Jeremiah was a writer, and I am not.’

And they would not say, ‘Why were you not Rabbi Akiba,’ for I would tell them, ‘Rabbi Akiba was a great teacher and scholar and I am not.’

But then they will say, ‘Zusya, why were you not Zusya?’ and to this I will have no answer.’

Psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (Pronounced: Me high, cheeks send me high), following his experience as a prisoner during WWII, became interested in people who were content with themselves, joy filled, and were motivated to do worthwhile things.

He became known as the father of ‘flow’.

Csikszentmihalyi interviewed athletes, musicians, and artists because he wanted to know when they experienced optimal performance levels. He was also interested in finding out how they felt during these experiences.

Csikszentmihalyi developed the term “flow state” because many of the people he interviewed described their optimal states of performance as instances when their work simply flowed out of them without much effort.

In Csikszentmihalyi’s words, flow is “a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (1990).

He writes: “The best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times . . . The best moments usually occur if a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile”
(Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Csikszentmihalyi describes eight characteristics of flow:

1. Complete concentration on the task;
2. Clarity of goals and reward in mind and immediate feedback;
3. Transformation of time (speeding up/slowing down);
4. The experience is intrinsically rewarding;

5. Effortlessness and ease;
6. There is a balance between challenge and skills;
7. Actions and awareness are merged, losing self-conscious rumination;
8. There is a feeling of control over the task.

Intrinsic motivation is when you do something because you love it. Csikszentmihalyi said the highest intrinsic motivation is a flow state where self-consciousness is lost, one surrenders completely to the moment, and time means nothing (2013). Think of a competent musician playing without thinking, or a surfer catching a great wave and riding it with joy.

https://positivepsychology.com/mihaly-csikszentmihalyi-father-of-flow/

References:

- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975). Beyond boredom and anxiety. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2002). Flow: The psychology of happiness: The classic work on how to achieve happiness. London, UK: Rider.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2004). Flow, the secret to happiness [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_on_flow?language=en
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2013). Flow: The psychology of optimal experience. New York, NY: Random House.

It appears that when we prepare for the light of Christ, when we point with our lives to this light… we are in flow…

This can all seem so abstract…

So what does it look like:
I want to end with a stories, of someone who inspires me, to be a preparer of the light of Christ:

A colleague and friend - Tom Wuest:
I met Tom when I worked at Jacob's Well on the DTES of Vancouver. Tom is a poet, song writer and gardener.

Tom lived in Strathcona, where China Town, the DTES and the growing hipster culture interfaced. And he began to write songs about prayer and faith at this juncture. Music just oozes out of Tom.

Words like:
“Do not forget the life of you poor
Do not forget the life of your poor,
let the poor and the desperate praise your name (3x)

O do not let the oppressed
return home ashamed”

“In our blindness lead us down that road
In our ignorance lead us down that road
In our violence, hate and indifference
We pray Lord you give us new sight”

In the early 2000’s, on his walk to work each morning, he would pass an overgrown empty lot close to Hastings street. The property was fenced with a locked gate. But people had still found ways to dump used needles, unwanted clothes, furniture on this land.

Tom and a few friends, wondered about the possibility of this place to grow food for the neighbourhood. They imagined something that could be.

They did not know who owned the lot, so they wrote a note and left it on the locked gate. Asking if they could tend the land for the owner.

Months went by and still no response.

So Tom, in one of his courageous risky moments, took a bolt cutter and cut the lock. They started by clearing the rubble. And then they cleared the weeds and brought in good soil. And began to till and plant.

When people walked by and asked, do you own the land, they would say no, we are taking care of the land for the owners.

One day in the fall, the owners showed up. They were a family with roots in China Town and this land had been in their family for 3 generations. There was a family house on the land. And it had gone into disrepair. And was burned to the ground by squatters 10 years prior.

The family discussed this, though first feeling quite violated, they came to a place where they were satisfied for these gardeners to tend their land and set up a more formal contract.

And that land, began to flourish. Tom and his friends, invited neighbours from the DTES to work with them, in harvest season, they hosted lunches in the garden using their own produce. This was the first community garden on the DTES of Vancouver.

When they tell of the story -
They quote the text from Isaiah we read today:

> "They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities"

https://vimeo.com/109866468

Preparing for the light of Christ.
Flowing with the things we love.
Being in the place where we are planted.

Like John, we are not the light
We are making a way for the light.

I cannot tell you how the light comes.
But that it does. That it will.
May we turn ourselves toward it.
May we open to the light…

Amen.