

Sermon – Dec. 10, 2006  
Luke 3 “Prepare Ye the Way”

G&P

**Some of Burnham's last words in the United States were also the last words of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of John, said Ralph Burnham, Martin's uncle, during yesterday morning's service at the church. "His very last words were, 'Follow thou me,'" Ralph Burnham said, his voice choking up. "Martin not only spoke of following him, but he took on that responsibility. Of course, at that time neither he nor any of us expected how far he was going to be required to go to. But he was willing to go."**

**Martin Burnham, 42, kept that attitude throughout the 376 days he and his wife, Gracia, 43, were held captive by the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group.**

**Just before a Philippine military raid on the kidnapers that led to Martin's death and Gracia's freedom, the two huddled together in a hammock under a makeshift tent.**

**"Martin and Gracia had really been thinking that there would be a chance that they would not make it out alive," said Martin's brother, Doug, relying on a phone conversation with Gracia. "Martin said to Gracia, 'The Bible says to serve the Lord with gladness. Let's go out all the way. Let's serve him all the way with gladness.'"**

**The two then prayed in their hammock, recited Scripture verses to each other, and sang. They laid down to rest. Then the rescue assault began and bullets began to fly, puncturing Gracia's leg and Martin's chest.**

Ted Olsen, "Martin Burnham Went Out Serving With Gladness" ChristianityToday.com (6-10-02);

submitted by Kevin A. Miller

Martin did not make it. But they were both prepared. They were prepared to give their lives in order the share the gospel of Jesus Christ to those in that country. They were prepared that even in the midst of imprisonment for over a year, they could still pray together and laugh together and sing together. They were prepared.

What are we prepared for today? We do not have to put our life on the line for the gospel, but that does not mean that we should neglect being prepared. Listen to this word from Isaiah this morning:

**"A voice of one calling in the desert,  
Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.**

**Every valley shall be filled in,  
every mountain and hill made low.  
The crooked roads shall become straight,  
the rough ways smooth.**

**And all people will see God's salvation.' " Luke 3:3-6**

We know that in St. Luke's story, it is God who is preparing the way for Jesus. It is God who has visited Elizabeth and Zechariah and the promised birth of John the Baptist. It is God through the witness of Gabriel the angel messenger who has visited young Mary with the news that she has been chosen to carry the child Jesus.

All of this preparation is done by God's Spirit, the director of this story. God is prepared and has prepared for this moment from the beginning of time. God has prepared and is now carrying out the plan. The character of this passion play are now coming into view. The vision of Isaiah is now.

For God is breaking in on the world. Nothing will get in the way of God's plan. Not deep valleys or high mountains, they will be lifted up and taken down. God wants nothing in the way of God's plan for salvation. Not even Satan will be able to tempt this plan away. For all will be revealed. All will be seen. All will see the salvation of God: Jesus Christ our Lord, crucified and risen.

I hope this is who you are preparing for in this season. I hope that Jesus is One whom you have in mind when you give your gifts to the church and to the mission of the gospel in the world. This is the hope of the faith.

The difficulty of this season is that we want to get to the tree and the gifts as fast as possible. I speak from experience. When I was growing up, and that is still in process, I would search the house because I knew that my mother had been shopping and I had heard her wrap the gifts. When I was at school, she had hidden them. Every year she got better and better at hiding the gifts. There were no gift cards back then. You received what you were given, no taking things back. You had to live with that sweater that your aunt gave you, even though it made you look awful. You tried it on with a smile or you would have a talk with your father later.

I would look for those boxes none the less, because there was a cool gift in at least one box.

Maybe a race car set, or a Lincoln log set. There was always that hope of hitting it rich. There is still that kid in me that wants to know what is in that box for me.

So how do we turn from the traditions of this season so that we can see the real reason for this celebration. We start by stopping what we are doing, we will buy the gifts and surprise one another with great gifts, but we need to stop and open our eyes to see God in this place. To see the hand of God in our life right now. To salvation right now.

**In September of 2004, on the 25th anniversary of their first record release, the rock group U2 became eligible for induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Although aware of the significance of such an honor, the band members decided not to become caught up in the accolades and accomplishments of the past.**

**"I suppose if people want to shower you with honors, the only reasonable thing to do is accept them," said bassist Adam Clayton. Drummer Larry Mullen Jr. then added: "But it does feel premature. We're trying to stay focused on the big prize."**

**Josh Tyrangiel, "Mysterious Way," Time (11-22-04), p. 83; submitted by Stephen Nordbye,  
Charlton, Massachuset**

Trying to stray focused on the prize. The prize? The gift of salvation later and the faith to live this grace now. Focused on the prize. That is what we are about in this Christian walk, to focus on the gift of God in Jesus Christ. TO open our hearts to see the salvation of God.

**Father and son Dick and Ricky Hoyt have run together in more than 800 Ironman races (which include swimming, biking, and running). But the son, Ricky, was born with cerebral palsy. To race, he must be pulled, pushed, and carried by his father. There is a part of us that might jump to the conclusion that Ricky does not race at all, but that his father does all the work. But tens of thousands of TV viewers saw the son's role in 1999, when wind, cold, and an equipment failure made progress hard on Ricky, even though his father was the one pedaling the modified tandem bike. Dick knelt down to his son, contorted and trembling in the cold, as the two were still facing many more miles of race on the defective bike. He said to the child belted to the bicycle seat, "Do you want to keep going, Son?"**

**The father would be the one enabling and providing the means to overcome, but the son still had to have the heart to finish.**

Bryan Chapell, Holiness By Grace (Crossway Books, 2001)

The son says he has the greatest father in the world. Because they kept their eye on the prize.  
For life is to be celebrated and lived as a gift.

AMEN