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Luke 1:57-80
Grace Episcopal Church
Alexandria, VA (6/23/22)

<https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearABC/HolyDays/NatJohn.html>

Good afternoon, Grace. In case we haven't yet met, I am Sarah Spurlock Biggs—one of your summer seminarians, and I am so grateful to be with you.

Today, we commemorate the Nativity of John the Baptist. The one who came to make way for the coming of the kingdom of God in the Advent of Jesus.

And for just a few minutes I'd like for us to reflect on the life and works of John the Baptist AND on the life and works of Grace Episcopal church.

In our Gospel reading today, we read of John's birth account—and of the profound significance of John's life. After first doubting this significance, John's father becomes filled with the Holy Spirit, and sings, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways."

It is St. John the Baptist who was long prophesied in the Old Testament to come to prepare the way of the Lord – to make way – for the Messiah to enter the hearts of all people.

One of the most prominent symbols of Grace Church is our statue of St. John the Baptist. This statue comes from our first church building on South Patrick Street. It is written in an account of our history, that our first building and the founding of Grace Church came about to make way for ALL to come and worship, without "regard for temporal estate."

Grace Church was founded so that those who could not afford the pew taxes of that time could gather for worship. Grace Church made a way.

It was St. John the Baptist's life's purpose and greatest joy to make way for Jesus to enter the lives of those he ministered to.

Clothed with camel hair, and eating locusts and wild honey, John had his own unique way of being in the world. The Word of God came to him, and he went into his neighborhood—the region around the Jordan River—to preach a baptism of repentance. Many people came to John to receive baptism, including Jesus.

John was outspoken in matters of social reform—calling out oppressive powers of the time, urging his followers to live righteously and generously—insisting they feed and clothe the needy.

John was passionate in his convictions, yet humbly remained aware that he himself was not the Messiah—acknowledging that his influence would decrease as Christ's influence increased. John's ministry was not inward facing to bolster himself – but outward for the benefit of God's kingdom.

In the few short weeks I have been here at Grace, it has been made clear that the people of Grace today, in many ways, sustain their original mission... In the joy and shared mission of our ministries, the people of Grace are making a way for Christ to be known in THIS time.

Like John, Grace is making way.

There might not be camel hair clothing or the eating of insects happening here, but here at Grace we do have something truly unique to offer. Our worship is rich in tradition and mystical in the ways it breaks through in our lives. Holy Eucharist is at the center of our corporate worship and inspires us to turn again and again to Christ—in repentance, as John the Baptist so urged us to do.

Like John the Baptist, our ministries respond to the needs of our neighbors. Like John, our ministries at Grace point beyond ourselves, and to the love of God in Christ Jesus. Like John, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we continue to make way for the love of Christ, and our neighbors, to inform ALL that we do.

Let us pray,

O Lord, we give thanks for the life and example of St. John the Baptist. We thank you that in your tender mercy you gave us your son, our savior and redeemer, Jesus. He received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit. Help us never forget that it is this same Spirit who sustains us still—who looks with compassion on those who suffer, and leads us into Your way of love and peace. Amen