

# 2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

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Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

## READ: MARK 1:1-8

"Prepare the way of  
the Lord, make his  
paths straight..."

## REFLECT:

The gospel reading set for this Sunday is the pithy and captivating opening to the book of Mark, the shortest gospel. It's a great opening. Continuity is drawn between Hebrew scripture and prophecy and the events about to be told. Then the characterful figure of John the Baptist is introduced and he, in turn, introduces Jesus.

I write this having just come from the funeral of Fred Hardiman of Wheatley URC. The service celebrated the life of a capable, practical man with many talents, including a sparkling sense of humour. He was well loved. And what also shone through in the stories we shared this morning was that Fred was a man who, like John the Baptist, pointed away from himself.

Fred gracefully ducked out of any limelight. He was generous with his time and skills but offered them quietly, sometimes even in secret. He didn't invite attention or want any fanfare or fuss.

Fred was ill for a long time before he died and I suspect he knew a good deal of suffering. I visited him a couple of times during his last hospital admission, quite close to the time of his death. When I offered to pray for him, Fred's answer was clear: "pray, by all means, but not for me. Pray for all those who are worse off than I am, and pray for Ann and my family." It was an answer that pointed away from himself; an answer very much in keeping with who Fred was and how he lived.

I suspect that between us we can think of many others whose service to our churches is faithful, invaluable and quietly offered. Those who prepare the way: cleaning and setting up our worship spaces, arranging floral displays, replenishing supplies, carrying out admin, maintenance and repairs. Those giving gentle, useful pastoral care.

There's an amazing lady in my neighbourhood who spends hours outdoors in all weathers sweeping leaves to keep the pavements clear. At this time of year its a cold, damp and endless task. When asked why, she says its because she doesn't want anyone to slip on wet leaves and fall. This is a very literal kind of preparing the way! And such a practical and humble act of care.

Advent, like Lent, is traditionally a time of preparation, self-examination and repentance. Perhaps our passage this week might prompt us to examine our own motivations. And to give thanks for self-effacing prophets like my neighbour, and like Fred, who point to our belonging to something much, much bigger than ourselves.

## CONNECT:

Take some time to remember and give thanks for those who have gone ahead, preparing the way for us. How do we help to prepare the way for those who will follow? How might we point away from ourselves and towards Jesus?

## PRAY:

- For Fred's family and friends, and all who are grieving at this time.
- Give thanks for those who've gone ahead: trailblazers who've smoothed the way for us, and encouragers who have quietly come alongside our own journeys.
- That our lives will point to Jesus.

## RESOURCES:

Our friends at Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website:

[www.wheatleyurc.org.uk](http://www.wheatleyurc.org.uk)

## SUPPORT:

Pauline and myself, and your elders, are here for you if you need someone to talk to, have a prayer request, or just fancy a chat! Ping us an email or give us a ring.