

It is our lot in life to prepare for uncertain things, for things that may work out differently than planned.

We buy life insurance that we hope our families will never need;

We know the stories of those who never got to enjoy the Social Security or the pension into which they had long paid, before their early death.

The prepared for a retirement they did not get.

My sermons are undermined by my mental failures and your coughing fits.

Other people are involved in so many things, and other variables too.

Every concert, lesson plan, and oral argument ever made, no matter how carefully prepared, comes to fruition in the uncertainty that is the human condition.

We and others involved may perform more or less well, especially under pressure.

Our freedom is used well and badly; and so our preparation may or may not achieve the desired outcome.

In the beginning, Genesis says, God created, God prepared, the heavens and earth from a formless void, from darkness, from the deep.

Over the days of creation, there was light, land, four-legged things, and the creatures of the air, and the crowning glory, a masterpiece, and God's greatest risk, a creature made in God's own image, humanity.

Like a master cabinetmaker or a highly trained painter, God,

by the processes remembered under Genesis story,

has called all that is into being and has so much into our care.

God prepared, we can say, us and all of this, to then set into its own patterns and life,

to see what our freedom would mean, how we would all endure, flourish, and suffer, together.

Like the maestro stepping up to his score,

the Lord has seen and sees what has become,

is becoming, of his creation, how his preparation is bearing out.

God too has prepared and let go and lives with a measure of uncertainty.

In the face of that, we hear of a need to prepare, to make ready in our lessons.

Isaiah sees a road being prepared in the desert,

for God to lead his people in.

Low places raised; high places lowered;

rough places smoothed.

John the Baptizer has seemed the fulfillment of that prophecy,

one who prepared a way for the Lord Jesus to come in,

preparing that way by his preaching and his calling to repentance,

getting Israel to a higher state of receptivity and spiritual awareness,

before the Lord would come in.

So John was like the warm up comic at a stand up show, the opening band before the main act.

We are in a different place in the salvation story, but his calling is ours in many ways.

John was there to prepare for the Lord's coming; we are here to prepare for his coming again.
As with John's preparation, there is uncertainty in our task.
John did not know what he was waking the people for, exactly.
He spoke of a fiery Savior, which was not what was found in Bethlehem nor what was seen in
the heartbreaking love of the Cross.
The church has sometimes expected the fiery return we hear about in the lesson from First
Peter,
and yet the Lord comes every day, in ways that are more interior, more peaceful,
that require a spiritual perception.

We prepare for our Lord who may come in dramatic majesty but who comes in bread and wine,
in others' acts of love and mercy,
in the quiet pf prayer,
and in the challenges to the unrighteous status quo by those who suffer in it.
We are here to be prepared and to prepare the world for all the ways,
some of them most unexpected, some of them highly disruptive,
that Christ may come.

So the God who prepared the creation and entrusted it to us has endured our disobedience and
inhumanity,
And has nonetheless not forsaken us but has come even closer in Jesus Christ.
We too offer what we have prepared to the world and to God, uncertain of what good we do,
wondering what the outcome will be.
Preparations can be offered in a different spirit, with an ironclad, deterministic sense of what the
outcome must be.
The anthem and sermon will be glorious, 100% of the time.
The tree will be straight, the ornaments perfectly spaced, every light on each string burning.
Every human will be an enthusiastic, right-believing Christian.
But we are closer to the divine mode of preparation when we do our work of preparing as pure
gift, giving our preparations to God and the world in hope and love, to see what will become.
In such a mode has salvation and mercy come to us in Jesus Christ, and in such a way are we
surely called to live.