

# Those Who Dream...Prepare the Way

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Faith Presbyterian Church, Sierra Vista, AZ  
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Isaiah 40:1-11, Mark 1:1-8

## Introduction

God's people find a way, sometimes they find a way out of no way. Such is the story of "Biddy" Mason, whose improbable story is part of a new exhibit in the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.<sup>1</sup>

Mason was born a Georgia-born slave, who was sold to a Mississippi family that converted to Mormonism and moved west, eventually settling in San Bernardino, CA. Realizing the Compromise of 1850 had made California a free state, Mason and a group of her fellow slaves attempted escape, only to be caught just short of Los Angeles. A freed slave got word of her predicament to the Los Angeles County Sheriff. On January 19, 1856, the United States District Court in Los Angeles heard Mason's case. She not only won her freedom, but also the emancipation of her three daughters and 10 other enslaved women and children.

But that was just the start of her amazing story! Having no last name, Bridget chose the middle name of San Bernardino's mayor and Mormon apostle, Amasa Mason Lyman. Saving much of what she earned as a nurse and midwife in Los Angeles, Mason purchased property on South Spring Street for \$250, becoming one of the first black Angelenos to own land. She went on to bank nearly \$300,000 in real estate, parts of which founded an elementary school for black children, a traveler's aid center, and the rock upon which First AME was originally built. That site is now a public city park bearing her name, complete with a mural that details her life story.

Our theme for today is Preparing the Way, and we can be inspired by the example of Biddy Mason, who, along with the Bible prophets and dreamers, looked for a way to make life better for those who followed her.

## More and Less in 2020

As 2020 has shown us, every part of our lives is somewhat affected by the pandemic and its continued grip here and overseas. What do our preparations for the holiday season look like this year? It's both more *and* less.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/peoples-history-nations-story-battle-station/>

On the more side: More people are putting up Christmas decorations early. – in need of bigger preparations in some ways. More people splurging on buying a “real” Christmas tree (some places that sell them are sold out already), folks are sending more holiday cards out. Parents with the means buying more gifts for their children this year because they feel guilty for how bad things are for their kids.

But the shadow side of more is less: in the US, millions of families are on the verge of being turned out of their homes, with eviction moratoriums ending, mortgage waivers stopping, and unemployment benefits running out. Business owners and landlords similarly stretched beyond their means. This year, unfortunately, it’s a Scrooge-like Christmas for many.

### **The Dreams of John the Baptist**

That’s when we need the dreams such as those in the Bible, to help us realize our spiritual journeys. In an area with mountains and hills, as well as agricultural valleys that sustained the populations, making a way was a spiritual journey, one filled with journeys of pilgrims, and prophets declaring the dreams that God has for the world.

Our Bible texts today remind us that even in grim conditions, God prepares our way to hear the good news about Jesus. In the book of Isaiah, we hear of a God who hears the cries of those in distress, of a God who will feed his flock like a shepherd, and carry his sheep to the mother sheep. John the Baptist prepares the people to hear Jesus and the dreams he has for the world.

### **What kind of preparations might we be called upon this year?**

In fact, we might hear the call of John today as a way of ‘straightening the path’ for an honored guest. For isn’t ‘preparing a way’ for the royalty who is Jesus done

- by being sure that those who are cold are given a means to be warm;
- by making a way for those who are hungry to be fed
- and yes, by ensuring that nothing stands in the way of safety (social distancing and wearing a mask) for all people?

So we are called to ‘prepare a way’ in our own hearts, but isn’t it also so that we would want Jesus to find a way into and to be at ‘home’ in this whole wide world? And might preparing in one way also help us to do so in the other way? Might action lead to contemplation and contemplation lead to action both? Might my making the world ‘ready’ help to make myself ready and might making myself ready lead to my making the world ready as well?

- What comes first for you? Action or Contemplation? In other words, how do you best prepare the way? Do you start in your own heart and mind or do you start in the world?
- What are the things that need to be 'removed' in you, in your community, in our congregation, in the world in order to "prepare the way?" And how does doing so lead to greater health, safety, and shelter for those who need it — yourself included?
- Or to think of this another way, what needs to be 'added' in order to make ready for the coming of Jesus?

I have offered a couple of images of ways in which things were or could be cleared away to make way or "prepare the way." In the coming week, think about what you might add to this? What examples help bring this Gospel to life for you?

Amen.