

# Road sign Talk

Luke 3:1-6

## Introduction

In our bible reading today, we hear of a fiery young prophet appearing in the Judaeian wilderness, going round the towns and villages telling people that the time had come.

His appearance – wild, scruffy, ate locusts, lived in the desert!

Luke's introduction to the story of John the Baptist is designed to give us a lot more detail than just when in history it happened. Behind the lists of names and places he lists at the start (Tiberius, Pontious Pilate, Herod and Philip) is a story of oppression and misery that is building up to explosion point.

- Tiberius was renowned for being ruthless
- Herod Antipas and Philip were ruling somewhat shakily, ruling with fear and oppression.
- The high priests weren't that much better
- Popular movements of resistance had come and gone, everybody knew they couldn't go on as they were.

Something had to happen.

But what?

For years, devout Jews has longed for a new word from God, to hear God speak like the times of old. Some had believed that prophecy had died out but might one day be revived.

The old prophets had spoken of a time of renewal, through which God himself would come back to them.

They only had a sketchy idea of what this would all look like

So when John arrives, people were ready to listen.

## So what was the message that John the Baptist brought?

Read the passage again – this time from the CEV, a slightly different translation.

In the CEV

‘Get the road ready for the Lord!  
Make a straight path for him.  
Fill up every valley  
and level every mountain  
and hill.  
Straighten the crooked paths  
and smooth out the rough roads.  
Then everyone will see  
the saving power of God.’

---

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness, (NIV)  
‘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

John is helping people to get ready for Jesus’ coming. He was doing what the prophet Isaiah had said: preparing a pathway for the Lord himself to return to his people. Get the road ready. This was the time. Rescue was at hand.

To help us unpack what John shared, we’re going to use some roadsign visuals.

### **Favourite Roads**

Give some examples of your favourite roads, and why eg. your favourite drive with hairpin bends, great scenery, steepest street in Dunedin, etc.

### **Road Sign & Markings Quiz**

*Optional quiz – was quite fun. See other element uploaded onto Connectible. We printed out bookmarks and gave each person one. Use your judgment as to how many roadsigns you ask the church about (if you’re running out of time, cut down the number!) Talk through each sign and ask them what it means.*

## **Road engineers**

John is a bit like a road engineer. He wants it to be easy for people to get to Jesus, so he reminds them about what's really important.

He was helping people get their hearts ready, not their houses or their belongings. He wanted people to be able to recognize Jesus when he arrived and to know that Jesus was coming to offer them love and forgiveness.

John the Baptist was making a straight, easy road for people to follow Jesus.

## **A journey of faith**

We are all on a faith journey, whether we know it or not.

We may be at the start, having only heard about this person called Jesus a few times, and don't know where to start

For some of us the road has been long. And often anything but straight! The path I've walked is different to yours.

*Share something of your own journey of faith...*

## **Which made me wonder...**

It made me wonder about how we, as the church, help people get their hearts ready for Jesus. How straight do we make the path to Jesus?

How straight? How complicated?

How easy we make it for everyone to understand the gospel of grace.

## **And in particular: for our children.**

How straight, how easy is the road for children to come to Jesus?

## Roadsigns

Let's break down John's speech and see how it might apply to us today

### Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him (NIV)

Make a straight path for him (CEV)



### Prepare

Prepare the way.

Don't just sit back and put your feet up.

Take stock. Get stuck in.

### Kingdom pilgrims

Robert Coles describes a child's faith journey as a pilgrimage, where children are active agents, walking with adults and God throughout their lives. In our New Zealand Prayer Book baptism liturgy, we say to the newly baptised: "*You are now a pilgrim with us.*"

As pilgrims, the children in our faith communities are on a pilgrimage *with* us. We're in this together.

A key focus of *StraNdZ* is to encourage churches to walk with children for the long haul, providing strategic faith formation, mentors, encouragement, love, support, opportunities to grow in the faith - over the years.

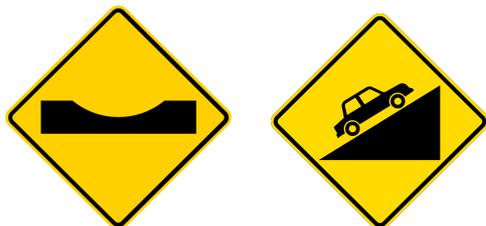
And what you do each week in a child's life, matters more than what you do when they are adults. Act now, don't wait.

As pilgrims, we walk with a child on a journey of faith, helping give them words to express their faith, giving them experiences to grow and take risks, examples to learn from, and safe communities to make mistakes.

We prepare the road ahead, we build a strong path and we walk with them on it.

## Every valley shall be filled, every mountain and hill made low

Fill up every valley, and level every mountain and hill (CEV)



### Pitfalls

What trips up our kids in their faith? Where are the hurdles?

What mountains do they face, the situations that seem too big and daunting? The make it/break it times in their faith?

In every phase of their life they're going to be asking questions, what are they? How can we help them understand and build their faith?

### Transitions

One of the biggest pitfalls in the church today is how we're transitioning kids through the different phases along the way.

Statistics also show that we are currently losing the battle for the hearts and minds of 50-80% of children raised in Christian homes. They walk away from their Christian faith by the time they go to College. (George Barna: Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions)

I think one of the best way to embed our children into the life of the church is to grow strong, **Intergenerational communities**.

“The best way to be formed in Christ is to sit among the elders, listen to their stories, break bread with them, and drink from the same cup, observing how these earlier generations of saints ran the race, fought the fight, and survived in grace.”

James Frazier, *Across the Generations: Incorporating All Ages in Ministry*

We need to provide intergenerational communities where children can take risks, grow in their faith, and connect with adults who will love, mentor and inspire them. Frequent and regular cross-generational opportunities for worship, learning, outreach, service and fellowship offer distinctive spiritual benefits and blessings.

Forming relationships with children is the responsibility of all members of the church, not just those who are involved in children's ministry or their parents.

<sup>2</sup> Ivy Beckwith, *Postmodern Children's Ministry to Children in the 21st Century*

## **The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth (NIV)**

Straighten the crooked paths and smooth out the rough roads. (CEV)



To know how to straighten the crooked paths and smooth out the rough roads, you need to know your families. You need to know what their roads look like, what curves and tough parts they're trying to navigate in their faith.

How do we do that?

### **Merge like a zip**

My favourite road sign – my family thought this was the best when they visited NZ

As we build intergenerational communities, partnering with parents and walking along side families, we provide an opportunity for mentoring and discipleship.



What is mentoring and discipleship?

Getting alongside someone and walking the road with them.

Sometimes it means supporting parents

Sometimes it's holding their hand through tough times

To encourage them, share Jesus with them, cheer them on, help share God's perspective.

Seeing a need and meeting it.

**“And when God illuminates a need, consider yourself called!”**

As we influence the lives of children and families, we influence a culture, a generation.

## **And all people will see God's salvation (NIV)**

Then everyone will see the saving power of God (CEV)



Intersection crossroads junction controlled priority route straight ahead

It's our prayer that every eye would see, that every tongue confess, that Jesus is Lord. That they know his love, comfort, peace that passes all understanding, joy and grace in their lives.

Both now and forever.

### **Prayer reflection**

Hand out merge like a zip cards

Before we finish with a prayer, we're going to spend a minute asking God to put someone on our hearts.

Who does God want you to come alongside?  
As a family, who do you need to come alongside you?  
Perhaps it's a child or children are in your community?  
Perhaps it's a family you know  
Perhaps it's a solo parent or some one elderly.  
Who can you encourage, pray for, support?



## A prayer of blessing

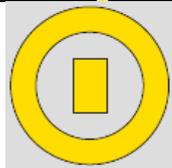
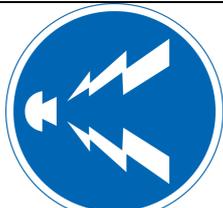
Using today's NT lectionary reading from Philippeans, pray a blessing over the congregation as they head into this week, as road engineers, smoothing out the roads that help young people come to Christ.

*[Name of church]*, I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

And *[Name of church]*, this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Created by Diana Langdon  
[www.strandz.org.nz](http://www.strandz.org.nz)

## Road Sign and Markings Quiz

	Slippery Surface
	Stop on request
	Clearance height advance warning 3.82m
	Fire Hydrant
	Parking in bays to right for 40mins only
	Children
	No parking
	Japanese Road sign – honk horn
	Slow down in Danish
	Man with umbrella