

Blazing Trails

Mark 1:1-8 (December 6, 2020)

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1The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; 3the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’”

4John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Historical Context

The key word for Mark was proclamation. In the time of Jesus, both official and unofficial news was communicated via heralds. The local town herald would proclaim news in the marketplace where people met for commerce and socializing. Other people would proclaim views and philosophies in the marketplace like the herald, including Christian evangelists. The contemporaries of Jesus were accustomed to hearing their news in this way.

Theme: Blazing Trails

On August 1, 2020, the Sarah K. Evans Plaza opened in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina. In 1952 Private Evans was on her way home from her first military assignment, when she refused to move to the back of the bus. Upon refusing, she was taken to jail and detained for 13 hours. Evans sued the Interstate Commerce Commission for discrimination. Despite a judicial victory in November of 1955, the ruling was not enforced until 1961. This trailblazing young woman set in motion that which would be later attributed to Rosa Parks. Her name is scarcely associated with the Civil Rights Movement, yet her action precipitated one of the most pivotal events of the time. Evans preceded Parks. Just as John preceded Jesus.

Forerunners are often unseen figures and unsung heroes. They garner minimal attention, because they are forerunners—those who plow the ground and destabilize the terrain. They are the antecedents of change, setting the stage for an alternative future.

In this text, may we hear and see the value of those who pave the way – the way to Jesus and the way to liberation in this present life. May we reflect upon the contributions of those who made ways for us when there seemed to be no way. How might we better see them, support them, and appreciate them? Are there those among us who are blazing trails?