

Sunday, December 5, 2021 – “Help Is on the Way”

– Bible Study & Reflection on Luke 3:1-6

Dear Members & Friends:

I invite you to read the following passage from Luke 3:1-6 (*International Children’s Bible*).

It was the fifteenth year of the rule of Tiberius Caesar. These men were under Caesar: Pontius Pilate was the ruler of Judea. Herod was the ruler of Galilee. Philip, Herod’s brother, was the ruler of Iturea and Trachonitis. And Lysanias was the ruler of Abilene. <sup>2</sup> Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests. At this time, a command from God came to John son of Zechariah. John was living in the desert. <sup>3</sup> He went all over the area around the Jordan River and preached to the people. He preached a baptism of changed hearts and lives for the forgiveness of their sins. <sup>4</sup> As it is written in the book of Isaiah the prophet:

“This is a voice of a man

who calls out in the desert:

‘Prepare the way for the Lord.

Make the road straight for him.

<sup>5</sup> Every valley should be filled in.

Every mountain and hill should be made flat.

Roads with turns should be made straight,

and rough roads should be made smooth.

<sup>6</sup> And all people will know about the salvation of God!” *Isaiah 40:3-5*

If you think of the twists and turns that people go through in life, it’s as if life is like a long, winding highway that weaves around and tunnels through the mountains and the wilderness. And so, this Sunday, the Intergenerational Message will help both our Sunday School learners and the young at heart to focus on how important road workers are in helping us to get from one place to another in our travels. In a way, we are like God’s road workers preparing a way for people to celebrate Jesus’ birth and to help others accept God’s love into their lives. We help to prepare people, help others to get ready to move from one place in their lives to another.

If I were preaching this message to only our adult members, my reflection would focus on John the Baptist’s message that God is sending us help to navigate through the wilderness places in our lives. Out in the wilderness, a prophet cries, “Get ready! The Messiah is coming!” John preaches in the wilderness, which we might think of as a metaphor for our life situation – a pathless, trackless, wasteland of a place where it is easy to lose one’s way.

John’s message is a simple one, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make God’s paths straight,” a quote right out of the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 40:3). Both Isaiah and John call upon us to be prepared for the arrival of One who comes to save us from the wilderness of sin and death.

And before John preached, there were stirrings of God’s advent. God had chosen from eternity not to let humanity fend for ourselves. Some of those dramatic Divine interventions are spoken of in the three other Advent texts for this Sunday: Malachi 3:1-4; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 1:68-79. Malachi 3:1-4 shows the prophet Malachi speaking of himself as a messenger who prepares a way for the coming of the Lord, an obvious connection with John the Baptist as the announcing forerunner of Jesus. In the epistle, Philippians 1:3-11, the Apostle Paul gives thanks for the struggling Christians at Philippi and promises them that God will respond to their present sufferings with future intervention. It’s as if we can hear Paul saying, “Hold on, help is on the way.” And then in the additional Gospel lesson, Luke 1:68-79, a childless couple,

Elizabeth and Zechariah, are given the good news (in Greek, *euangelion*, “gospel”) that they are to have a child whose name will be John. These older adults get the news that their future will not be in their hands but is in God’s hands. Thus was John the Baptist conceived.

Because these stories are together a truthful rendition of the nature of the God who saves, it means that those who are lost can count on being found, those who are desperate can trust that their desperation is a call to God, that those who are hopeless can have hope. Help is on the way.

How we need to hear that message in our personal situations (dare I say “wildernesses”) and in light of current world events. We need help which is beyond ourselves. We often find ourselves in situations where we are powerless to fundamentally change them. We need help, help beyond the limits of human striving. Here is the Advent good news: Hold on. Help is on the way.

Advent is a season of preparation. And yet, there is a sense in which we can’t prepare for Christ’s advent into our world and into our lives because life itself is preparing us. In all those ways in which life casts us into situations where we stumble and fumble in the darkness and can’t find our way, when we don’t know which way to turn, when we have exhausted our possibilities and have come to a metaphorical dead end, life is preparing us to admit that which is hard to admit in our culture of independence and self-help, namely, we need help. That’s when we are truly prepared to hear the good news of Advent: Help is on the way!

Our help is in the name of the Holy One, who made heaven and earth. Amen.

Blessings,

Pastor Greg Rupright