

THE WAY OF THE LORD
SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LUKE 3:1-20
DEC. 6, '15

¹ In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight,
and the rough places shall become level ways,

⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

⁷ He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham." ⁹ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" ¹¹ And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." ¹² Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" ¹³ And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." ¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

¹⁵ As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, ¹⁶ John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

¹⁸ So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.

We are on way to meet Christ who comes to us in the flesh.

Sundays of Advent lead us to follow path
commonly used in prayer: first praise, then confession,
then thanksgiving, then our requests.

Last Sunday we looked where we are going.

and resounded with praise at seeking kingdom of God.

This Sun. readings remind us one of first steps is repentance.

as one of first steps in construction is clearing what is there

and one of first steps in getting ready for celebration
is cleaning the house.

We should make ourselves familiar with these this pathway
of praise, repenting, thanksgiving and asking God's help
because this is a constant process in our lives.

THE WAY THINGS ARE IS CONSTANTLY ERODING
THE WAY TO LIVE IS CARING AND BEARING FRUIT
THE WAY OF SALVATION IS CHRIST'S WORK

THE WAY THINGS ARE IS CONSTANTLY ERODING

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Word for valley in original language in v. 5 is means ravine
with steep sides, as one washed by erosion.

Erosion is constant problem in dry barren areas.

Is also constant problem in society

v. 1 dates ministry of John and Jesus, shows it is real events
that happened in real history along with other real things.

Also indicates challenging political & religious realities of time.

It was difficult time to be proclaiming God's kingdom.

Path of history runs through peaks and valleys

and this was a vally.

Tiberius Caesar, who followed great Augustus, was madman.

Reign was known for scheming and political intrigue.

Corruption breeds corruption.

So it was unstable time with periods of famine & inflation.

Problems were reflected in local politics.

After powerful Herod the Great, ruled when Jesus was born,
his territory was broken into quarters, tetrarchies.
ruled by small time politicians

Religious life was also in chaos.

High Priest who was supposed to lead for life, Annas
was replaced with one appointed by Roman authorities,
his son-in-law Caiaphas.

Point is that is way of the world is peaks and valleys
and constant erosion.

If you follow news, you could say same about society today.
No wonder people are attracted to an outsider,
politically incorrect man from wilderness, not seat of power,
who speaks boldly, although not carelessly.
He declares that God is going to level out peaks and valleys.
But his way of doing it is not politics
or those in powerful positions
but working in our own personal lives.

THE WAY TO LIVE IS CARING AND BEARING FRUIT

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John goes on to say God is winnowing, clearing threshing floor.

In threshing, the wheat that has been gathered is beaten,
not to damage it but to knock the good grain loose
from the worthless stalk, straw and chaff.
then it is winnowed, thrown into wind, to separate
the heavier grain from chaff that is blown away
into a pile that is burned.

During difficult times we may feel we are being beaten up
not just by forces in society & culture but by God.
This does not mean that we are being abandoned by him
but that we are being prepared for wind of the Spirit
to move us in a different direction from the rest.

When the beating and burning starts,
like when road construction starts tearing things up,
the vermin and vipers and other critters go scurrying away.
In other gospels, Pharisees are called brood of vipers.
In Luke's account, it is the whole crowd.
We are to recognize that the seed of Satan is at work
planting weeds in the hearts of all of us.
We are not naturally born children of God
but conceived and born in sin & it bears fruit in us.
We can't claim God's blessings based on our heritage
any more than John's audience.

In difficult times, temptation is to just look out for ourselves.
at the expense of others
Keeping eye on authority for what we can get away with
God is calling us instead to keep our eyes on him
and his salvation that gets us away from sin.

Especially in difficult times we find ourselves
speaking hurtful, deceitful and angry things,
doing careless things because it is easier at the time,
thinking hateful and arrogant things that produce as fruits
hurts in the lives of others, more difficulties for ourselves,
a bad image of our God.

O.T. lesson today from Malachi says God will come in judgment
against those who swear falsely, the adulterers,
those who mistreat hired workers and widows,
those who push aside sojourners, foreigners.
Is this happening today?

In contrast, today's Epistle pleads that "your love may abound
more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,..
"filled with the fruit of righteousness."

Because of his living in wilderness, some think John
may have lived with Essenes, Jewish group at the time
which, because of corruption in culture,
chose to separate from rest of society, live in isolation.
But notice that when people ask what they should do
as they live lives of repentance,

separation from society is not what John directs them to.
When he is asked by tax collectors & soldiers, very worst
symbols of the corrupt and worthless government
what they should do, he does not tell them,
stop being tax collector, stop fighting wars,
Instead he tells them to fulfill their vocation, role in society
in honesty, integrity, as civil servants
rather than abusing positions of power selfishly.

His answer to the rest is similar.

They all need to repent, to have change of heart,
and fruits, the change of life that flows from this
is not some special religious acts or becoming hermits
but fulfilling role in which God has placed them
as parents, workers, neighbors,
living in caring relationship with those around them
and so helping and sharing with those in need.

So, will this fruit will keep the tree from being cut down?

Is this what will save us from the coming wrath,
a changed way of life?

Is it being nice instead of naughty that will get us presents?

No...

THE WAY OF SALVATION IS CHRIST'S WORK

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the people.

It is easy to hear the law in John's message,

but Luke tells us he is preaching good news of Gospel.

John is not the Christ, the savior.

Doing good things he says to do is not way of salvation,
although step on way to being ready for salvation.

The way of salvation is the good Christ does for us.

When the valleys eroded by corruption are being filled in
and hills of pride and abusive power are cut down

what comes to be seen is the salvation of God,
that is, the salvation God himself works.
It is not threats of punishment or doom
that produce genuine changes of heart
but the wonderful promises of God's love
It is not what we do to improve our way of living
but what Christ does for us to give us life.
God himself can raise up from stones children of Abraham
and that is what he does.
He works on our cold and hardened stony hearts
to transform us into living stones of a temple
in which he himself lives.
How does he do this, with the same tools John used,
water and the word.
John's preaching and baptizing in the wilderness
is following same path ancient Israel followed
when they came out of slavery through red sea
into desert where they were formed into God's people.
God leads us on same path through our baptism,
What quenches the fire of the coming wrath?
It is water, the water of life which is Jesus.
John says our baptism from Christ does more than his,
beside picturing washing away sin
We also receive Holy Spirit in baptism,
who uses God's word to cause genuine faith.
And this Spirit continues to work in us to cause
our hearts to burn with desire to love & obey God.
This is why every single day we need to live in our baptisms,
by the continued work of his word in our lives,
recognizing and repenting of our sins
receiving his forgiveness to drown our old sinful self
having our new self revived by his grace.
This needs to keep happening in our lives again and again

THE WAY THINGS ARE IS CONSTANTLY ERODING
in society and in our own lives.

THE WAY TO LIVE IS CARING AND BEARING FRUIT
in the places and positions where we live.

THE WAY OF SALVATION IS CHRIST'S WORK
which he does within us through his Spirit's work
with his word and sacraments.