

Sermon for Advent 2, Year C

The Text: Luke 3:1-6

There was a custom before the days of the prophets, practiced by the Kings of the Orient, that whenever a king wished to make a journey, he would first send out his officials to prepare the area through which he intended to travel. The officials would go to the people living in the region and order them, in the name of the King, to prepare the highway for their lord. The people would then have the task of making sure the roadway was ready for their king. They would clear away any brush or dead branches, they would fill in any ruts or potholes, and they would even level the surface so that everything would be ready for their king; so that he would have the smoothest journey possible.

This is the picture that Luke seems to be giving us with John the Baptist. John the Baptist is the forerunner of the Saviour and the official of the Lord in the Judean wilderness. He came summoning the people to clear the way of all obstacles so that Israel's Lord and Saviour could have a smooth road to their hearts as he came to set his people free from their sins.

This mission, to prepare the way for the Lord, was the very mission that John had been given even before he had been born. For when the Angel Gabriel visited Zechariah in the temple as Zechariah was burning incense, Gabriel told Zechariah that the child that would be born would be great in the sight of the Lord. He would be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from birth. By his preaching he would bring many in Israel back to the Lord their God, which is exactly what John was doing when we meet him in our lesson today.

Luke writes: *“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene - during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘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 mankind will see God’s salvation.’”* (Luke 3:1–6)

John went around the area of the Jordan preparing the way of the Lord by calling the people to repentance through the Law of God. He baptized the repentant in the waters of the Jordan, assuring them of the forgiveness of sins, preparing them for the Messiah who would soon be coming into the world. In fact, he did this so effectively that people began to flock to him from Jerusalem, the region surrounding Judea, and even from places as far away as Capernaum in Galilee. Many people who would never have considered going to the desolate region of the Jordan went there to see and hear for themselves what he had to say.

In the same way that John prepared the way of the Lord in his day, he is doing the same for you and me today! Though we don’t have him standing in front of us preaching repentance, through Luke’s account we have the next best thing. For as we look back at the account of John’s preaching, we hear just how forceful of a speaker he must have been. We hear him preparing the Messiah’s Highway into the hearts of his people by calling them to repent because the kingdom of heaven is at hand. We hear him going up against the Pharisees and other religious leader telling them flat out that just because Abraham is their father, this will not save them. Their self-righteous ways will get them eternal death.

And we also hear him, as he also turns to us and rebukes us for our sins. We too have been right there with the tax collectors taking more than our fair share. We too have been right there with the soldiers accusing people falsely and slandering their names to our friends. We too have let the fire

of our anger rise against those who have wronged us and sworn that we would get even with them. We too have let our tongues run wild, gossiping about anyone and anything in any place at any time of day.

In truth, we are no different than the Israelites who came out to hear John in the wilderness. We, too, need John to prepare the way for our Lord, because the road to our hearts is also covered with many obstacles of sin, doubt, and disbelief. Maybe sometimes we need to be bought to attention with John's words, "*you brood of vipers. Who warned you from the coming wrath?*" We need to be reminded to look at the mirror of God's Law. Then we might see the shame and the guilt of those sins reflected in our eyes, and before we know it, we are down on our knees in sorrow over our sins, repenting, and praying to the Lord our Savior for forgiveness. It is in this way that our hearts are prepared for the coming of the Lord and the way to our hearts made smooth and ready for him!

Then the way is prepared for Jesus to enter our hearts and lives with the soothing gospel, filling in those trenches of heartache and despair. Though the Law shows our reflections covered with sins, Jesus uses his gospel to remove each spot and stain of our sins. He uses the gospel to cover over every one of our iniquities so that all that is reflected is the Salvation of our God. He shows us that the true and only way to our homes in heaven is through faith in him.

He assures us that though we may have taken more than our fair share, even though we have let our anger rise and sought to get even, even though we have let our tongues run wild, and even let rage and jealousy cloud our minds, these things have all been forgiven. Not only have they been forgiven, but we are moved to live our lives according to God's will out of love for our Saviour.

This is why John's work as forerunner to the Messiah was such important work. For as forerunner, it was his mission to prepare the way of the Lord. Though John may not have gone out and commanded the people of the region to prepare the roads so that their king could travel on them, he did prepare the hearts of the people for the coming of their Savior. Through his use of Law and Gospel, John was able to prepare the way of the Lord, so that the nations would be ready for the coming of their Savior.

Thus, we can be sure that John came in fulfillment of the prophecy that Isaiah had uttered so many years before, for through his proclamation of Law and Gospel, John has prepared the way for the Lord for countless generations of believers who have come to faith through the work that he did.

All to prepare the way for the Lord to come to us with divine grace and favour. To him be the Glory forever and ever. Amen.