

Luke 3:1-6

2nd Sunday in Advent

Dec. 4, 1988

Remember the westerns?

~~ixwaxxraixaxxaxxawhaxxshaxxaxxaxx~~ Wagon trains racing the seasons to get west. Always fall with its mountain snows stood poised to block the path ahead. Broken ~~axax~~ wagon wheels, attacks by the Indians, lack of water on the dusty plains, shortage of food, or horses or oxen to pull the wagons, these too sought to gring the dreams of the travelers to dust. Rivers to ford, steep ascents, rocks and bolders in the way, always life and death ~~staxixixixix~~ ~~hax~~ hung on every decision~~x~~. The great American wilderness ~~axaxaxax~~ exacted its toll before the promised land of Oregon and California was reached.

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord. make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be ~~make~~ straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Once John the bapt~~ist~~ was ~~what~~ voice, calling a people passing through the wilderness of this world to repentance. Prepare the way of the Lord.

Today I have the role of John the Baptist, you are the people ^{journeying} ~~wanderingx~~ through the wilderness on your way to the promised land.

But hold everything. We thought we were in the promised land, didn't we. shiny reliable cars have replaced the wagons with wooden wheels. Paved roads, smooth and with easy grades have taken the place of all the rock strewn, dusty paths. I sit down in my chair, put on a compact disc of the Canadian Brass playing Bach, and I tell myself this must be what heaven is like. Such sound, such beauty, what more could I ~~axx~~ want? I don't have to put up with scratches any more, nor tapes wearing out. My compact disc sounds as good the fortieth time as it did the first.

All around us the same is true. When the ~~two~~ Refugees from Poland that our congregation sponsored first went shopping, their eyes lit up like those of children at Christmas. Everything they'd ever dreamed of, and more. It's no wonder we don't show the movies about the wagon trains much anymore. Life

is easy and good, we don't know what to make of struggles between life and death.

But take a look at the faces you see each day. Smiling, bright, happy? No, worn, weary. Racing around in a wilderness that looks like the promised land, but isn't. And outraged, by pain, by disappointments, outraged when our toys break or our neighbors will not bend to our wishes.

Prepare the way of the Lord. These words were first spoken by the prophet to people in Babylon, God's people in exile far from home. They were an invitation to return to Judah, to Jerusalem, to the land where the Lord was worshipped. Most never did. They said, we like it just fine in Babylon, they stayed, and forgot the Lord.

Prepare the way of the Lord, the word comes to us. Every rock and mountain and valley that stands in the way, let them be leveled, clear the debris, make the rough ways smooth, the crooked straight.

First we need to know where we are. This is not the promised land. When neighbors near and far are hungry, where disease and death are lurking behind most every tree, when behind closed doors and drawn curtains we hurt one another with our words and our deeds, where there are never enough amusements to quiet the wailings of lostness, ~~xxxx~~ aloneness, we are walking through the wilderness Where God is not worshipped and acknowledged it is the wilderness.

In the wilderness John the Baptist called the people to repentance. You know what stands between you and your Lord. You know the trash and the debris that clutters the path on which he seeks to come to you. You know those things which you do for which you feel guilty, the things you fail to do that ~~that~~ become bricks in a wall between you and your Lord. Repent, For one it is pride, another greed, for another anger, for another alcohol, for another tobacco, for another food, for another sexual promiscuity, ^{is another slipping.} I don't know what walls keep you alone, but you know. You know what it is that eats at your heart what keeps you from wanting to pray, let go of it, Prepare the way of the Lord.

Today. The snows are coming, and when they come the pass will be closed. There is great danger when we are not on the move, great danger if we remain in Babylon too long. Prepare the way of the Lord, today.

Know this: most will stay in Babylon. Most of the wagons in the wagon train will stop in Nebraska, or Wyoming and try to make the best of life in the wilderness, it seems easier that way. They are realistic, they know that they are not strong enough to get past the mountains.

They are right. ~~Whether it is~~ Move one rock and there is always another in the path, cross one mountain and another waits behind it. ~~Some thought,~~ Such is the wilderness we traverse until we cross over the Jordan of death

Prepare the way of the Lord.

Beginning in Bethlehem God cut a new path through the wilderness. He brought low the mountains and hills, lifted up the valleys, made the crooked straight, the rough ways smooth. Gád showed his salvation beginning in the stable in Bethlehem.

His is the way through the mountains that no snows can cut off, no sin can block. Can you believe it? Your sin cannot keep him from loving you, forgiving you, bring you to the promised land.

Prepare the way of the Lord. Try your hardest, people of God to make your way through the wilderness. When you discover you can't look to him who can, your Lord Jesus Christ.