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Luke 3:1-6

Preparing

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Luke 3:1-6 New Revised Standard Version

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out 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 made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

We have to prepare a lot for Christmas. Decorations, Christmas cards with the perfect picture, presents, dishes to bring for the get-togethers with family and friends. It can be exhausting. And we focus on ourselves, and what we have to do. Friday night we drove for a while looking at Christmas lights and it was so fun and I loved it so much. We were listening to the radio station that plays Christmas songs and then we saw a manger scene in someone’s front yard and Everett who is 8 cried out from the backseat, “There is Jesus!” And I thought, oh yes, Jesus. That’s what Christmas is about. And for just a few moments, I stared at that cradle holding the Son of God, God made flesh who lived among us, and the to-do lists were forgotten, and I thought about Jesus, my Lord and my God.

There has been a lot of news in our world that has made me forget about Jesus. But then I think about the March and Peace Rally yesterday from Fair Park to the Martin Luther King Community Center that was organized originally to counter the KKK that were planning to come protest at a mosque in Irving. I think about the prayer vigil Wednesday night at the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center in Dallas to end gun violence. I think about Syrian refugees lovingly welcomed to new homes. I think about the 17 folks going from this house to build a home, and we are trying to raise money to build a second home in Juarez with Proyecto Abrigo in January. So, buy your tamales today!

John the Baptist wants me to know, and all of us to know, that God is calling out to us. God is coming to us and inviting us to be a part of all that God is creating. John the Baptist says, repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand. And if we are willing to say no to fear, if we are willing to do a 180 degree turn, if we are willing to turn toward God and acknowledge our need for God, then we have the opportunity to be a part of the work that God is doing. Because every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God. God is smoothing the rough roads ahead, God is making straight the path.

God calls us to repent, to believe, to walk the road that God is preparing that leads to God. Repentance means to change directions. But first we have to admit that we are lost. We want to believe that we are self-reliant and that we are in control. We want to believe that it is all up to us. But, praise the Lord, God is only calling to us. We have a choice to make today. We can live in ways that foster community and speak words that draw the circle wider. We can display a welcoming grace that lets love continue and grow. Or we can choose fear. We can choose to turn away from God and God’s love. And I think about Georgia and Bennett who were baptized today and all of the future generations that are coming. I want them to know that we chose love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Step one is when we ask for help. It is like when you are driving and you know that you need to stop and ask for directions. Step one is when you pull over. It is when we realize that we need to follow God’s directions. Step two is when we turn ourselves around and go in the direction that God wants us to go. It is when we admit that we need to do what God asks us to do rather than doing what we think is best. We know what God wants us to do. But, then our fear gets in the way. We get in the way.

Repentance is when we acknowledge that we have been our own Lord. I was talking with one of our Greenland Hills family this week and I asked them what made them come to Greenland Hills. And they shared with me the story of going to church occasionally as a child and as a youth their decision to become an atheist and then their realization that they were more of an agnostic. And then when they were in their twenties, they were driving home from work and Carrie Underwood’s song, “Jesus Take the Wheel” came on and they knew that Jesus was calling out to them. And they needed Jesus to take the wheel. They listened to the words of the song and they heard Carrie Underwood sing, “She was so scared. She threw her hands up in the air. Jesus take the wheel. Take it from my hands. Cause I can’t do this on my own. I’m letting go. So give me one more chance. Save me from this road I’m on. Jesus take the wheel.”

God comes to us. It is a message of grace, because the transformation of our lives is not something we do. It is something that God does for us as we walk the road God has prepared for us. So, we confess our need for God, we acknowledge that there are areas in our lives where we are on the wrong path, and we turn to God and we begin to walk in the path God sets before us and we look for God’s presence right there with us.

This week in what some might say is the busiest month of the year, I went with my sister and a friend to a spa in Austin for our 2nd annual trip. They have activities that raise your heart rate and are thus supposed to be good for you, or something. One of these activities is called the Big Swing. You get on a helmet and step into a harness and clip in, and are then cranked up to the top of this pole.

When you get to the top, you have to pull the cord yourself. Last year when I went on the Big Swing with my sister, I was so scared. But, I didn’t want her to know, so I told her that I would pull the cord. But, then when we were high above the ground, I couldn’t do it. I was too scared. This year as I walked towards the Big Swing, I felt those butterflies in my stomach. And I acknowledged my fear, and reminded myself that last year I had survived, and I had even had fun. So, we get strapped in and we go high up above the ground and I look at my sister who is taking deep breaths so that she can hold her breath when we swing. And my sister isn’t pulling the cord. And I realize that I am afraid. I am high up, I can see over the trees, and it is gorgeous. But I have done this before. I am going to be okay. I acknowledge the fear and I know that God is with me. So, I look over at my sister and her eyes are scrunched up, and I decide that I am going to pull the cord. And I am going to try to enjoy this, I am going to let go of the fear that I feel. So, I do, and I could not stop laughing. I had been so afraid and there was nothing to be afraid of.

There is so much happening in our world that we could be afraid of. If we trust in God, we don’t have to worry. And we might realize that there is nothing to be afraid of.

In our Scripture the writer of Luke’s Gospel listed all the important people, the Emperor and the Governor, and the High Priests, and then comes to the itinerant preacher doing ministry out in the wilderness. He goes from the who’s who’s to the nobody.[[1]](#footnote-2) But it is to that nobody that the Word of the Lord came. Not the Emperor, or the governor, or various rulers, or high priests, but John.[[2]](#footnote-3)

You could say that God chose a nobody to prepare the way for God’s Son to come among us. God regularly chooses people whom the world sees as insignificant through whom to do marvelous things.[[3]](#footnote-4) Again and again God chooses people the world easily ignores to participate in the world-changing, world-saving activity of God. John the Baptist, an illiterate unwed mom and teenager Mary the mother of Jesus, the animals in the manger as Kristin Mallory talked about.

We don’t have to be celebrities or rulers or among the rich and powerful to be used by God. God wants to use our talents and our abilities and our gifts today, today, to change the world. It might seem like what you are doing is small, but standing up for justice is not small. Standing up for the last and the lost and the least is not small. God works through our relationships, and our jobs and our families and our lives to make this world more trustworthy and good.[[4]](#footnote-5)

We are waiting, we are longing for all things to be made new and we only need to look around and realize that God is present in our lives and in our work. God is with us. God came to John the Baptist, a nobody, to prepare the way for the coming Christ so that all people might see and receive God’s salvation. Christ is coming to the world in the form of a baby. May we receive Christ’s continual coming to us through God’s Word and Holy Spirit as we watch for Christ’s final return in majesty and glory. And may we take the hopeful message of Christ’s coming to a world longing for peace.

1. http://www.davidlose.net/2015/11/advent-2-c-audacious-historians/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.davidlose.net/2015/11/advent-2-c-audacious-historians/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. http://www.davidlose.net/2015/11/advent-2-c-audacious-historians/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. http://www.davidlose.net/2015/11/advent-2-c-audacious-historians/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)