

Second Sunday of Advent

Sermon Text: Luke 3:1-6

Theme: *“We prepare the way of the Lord”*

Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

“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 become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of the God.” These are John the Baptist’s words that describe the work to be done as we prepare for the coming of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Heavenly Father, sanctify us in the truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

Bound by time

We are in the second week of Advent and as we heard during our Advent Evening presentations, this season is a time of preparation for the coming of Jesus. But the thing is we live in the ‘in-between’ times. Jesus has already won salvation for us on the cross, but we live in the time when we look forward to him coming again in glory to fix all things up by restoring them to himself. This ‘in-between’ time is a little like the time of school holidays for the students and staff of our college. They look back over the year that has been but they also look forward to the challenges and opportunities of a new year.

I shared this with the staff as they finished their last day on Friday. The thing is that we are bound by the time and place in which we live. This is the time that God has given to you. There is nowhere else that you can be other than Trinity Lutheran Church on Sunday morning, 6th December 2009. But even if we are bound to this time and place, we can look back over the past year, or the past period of time and we can reflect on our achievements and/or our disappointments and we can learn from them. Whether you are a teacher reflecting on the past school year, or someone who is reviewing their employment for a particular company, or you might be an older person looking back on a lifetime lived – look back and learn from what has gone before.

But there is a potential problem in looking back to what has gone before, and that is that we start living in the past. Instead of learning and growing, we can become bound into the events of the past, either lamenting the lost opportunities or basking in the glories of grand achievements. In either case, we are living in the past and quite possibly ignoring the issues of the present.

The opposite to looking back and learning from the past is to look forward and plan for the future. Surely this is where the excitement is to be had, for if there is one thing we know about the future, it is unpredictable. In fact C.S. Lewis describes the future as the least real time we have and the devil wants to keep us locked in this time for that very reason. At least the past has actually happened and we can learn from it. But the future hasn’t happened and we can’t ever know what will take place. Now this doesn’t mean we shouldn’t plan for the future, but just don’t live your lives there. Don’t get trapped into the idea of always planning projects or adventures without ever doing them. Don’t be a ‘gunnadoo’ person who never actually gets around to doing what they said they would.

During this season of Advent we remember Jesus coming as a baby on that first Christmas but we also look forward to Jesus coming again in glory. Look back and learn from the past, look forward with excitement for the future but let’s stop and remember where we are here and now.

Prepare the way of the Lord

John’s voice called out in the wilderness for us to prepare the way of the Lord. These were words for those who heard his voice and of course they heralded the coming of Jesus as he began his earthly ministry. But John’s words continue for us today. Through Holy Scripture John continues to cry out, “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 become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

Yes Jesus has come, but he is still to come a second time. John's words are as important to us today as they were 2,000 years ago. And just as John wasn't talking about major road works around Jerusalem, he's not talking about major road works around Cairns today. He is talking about the major work inside each one of us. He is talking about smoothing out the rough spots in our hearts. He is talking about a reconstruction of our lives so we might receive him well.

The irony is of course that this work has already been completed for us. When you were baptised, the coursing effect of God's water carved away all the mountains that would block his grace, the waters of baptism filled every nook and cranny in your hearts, and as water will always follow the straightest path, it gouged a direct line between God and you. The way of the Lord has been prepared by God for you.

If this is the good work that God has completed for you, we have just one small problem. If ever you have driven along a road that has recently been completed, what a delight it is because it is so smooth and lovely. For those who have driven to the Tip of Cape York, everyone gets sick and tired of the corrugations. You'll be driving along thinking the dash is going to land in your laps at any moment when all of a sudden, a section of sealed, smooth road appears before you. The joy and bliss of not bouncing up and down. But soon the corrugations begin again. Our lives can mirror the roads on which we drive. They may start off smooth, but sometimes it doesn't take long before they are rough and filled with discomfort or even danger. Sometimes we'll drive a long time, enjoying a good road, at other times it seems more pot-holes than a road at all.

How do these pot-holes and obstacles appear in our lives? We start out washed clean and smooth by God, but somehow we seem to keep adding the troubles of life to the Way of the Lord. Psalm 1 says that God alone knows the way of the Righteous, yet we want to head off, making our own road to follow. Our human nature seems so quick to swap God's smooth path of peace with a rocky, stony track that heads into the wilderness, with no clear end in sight.

This is the time

So John's cry to prepare the way of the Lord remains relevant for you today. The question is, how do we prepare for Jesus? The answer is remarkably simply. Trust in him. This is the work God has given us to do. Jesus has finished the work in us, all we need to do is to believe in him and when we have wandered off the path God has mapped out for us, we ask him to *forgive us*. God then restores us to the smooth, even way that was given to us in our baptism.

As this calendar year draws to a close I encourage you to look to the past and learn from what has already happened in your life. But do not dwell in the past – it has had its time. As we look forward to Christmas and a new year, anticipate and plan for the future. But do not live only for the future, planning and imagining but never doing – tomorrow will come of its own accord, with its own challenges, in its own time. Live in this time. This is the time and the place that God has put you in. Look at what needs to be done now. What has God called you to do this day? Believe that God has a purpose for you and that he has equipped you for this work now. God's work for you isn't trapped in the past, nor is it something imagined in the future. It is in front of you right now.

Other than believing in God and trusting that he has prepared the smooth, even path for you, I can't tell you what God's purpose for you is. For each and every one of you it will look different.

But I do rejoice as together with the apostle Paul I pray today's second reading, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Amen.