**Sermon 12/9/18**

**Gospel Reading Luke 3:1-6**

Some years ago, a couple in their mid-forties,

       were very lucky and picked the correct six numbers in the lottery.

A newspaper reporter interviewed them and asked them what changes in their life

          would take place after winning such a large amount of money.

They insisted that their unexpected winnings would not change

         anything at all in their lives.

Because of this statement, the paper did a follow up story a year later to see

         if what they said was true.

Much to the reporter's surprise, he discovered that it was.

They were living in the same three-bedroom house, working at the same jobs,

          driving the same second hand car, still going to the pub

          once or twice a week for a drink.

It appeared that nothing had changed apart from their bank balance.

A pastor and some of his friends were discussing this story over lunch

         shortly after it appeared in the paper and on TV.

All of his friends admired the couple for being able to do this.

They believed it was wonderful the couple were so content with their lives

          they didn't want to change anything.

But his friends were somewhat shocked when the pastor commented,

          “What a sad outcome!”

Here they were with nearly a million dollars in their bank account,

             and they were not willing to change anything.

His friends were wishing that they could be like this couple,

           contented with what they had, and the way they lived.

           They were so content they did not wish to change anything.

But the pastor was thinking, "God, please never let me get like that."

This couple had received a great treasure.

         But they did not put any of it to work in their lives.

         They did not experience any peace or joy from their winnings.

The pastor tried to explain to his friends

          how many Christians are exactly like this couple.

"Ok," he admitted, "Most of us don't have a million dollars in our bank accounts.

          Instead we have received something much more valuable.

When we gave our lives to Christ each of us was given the gift of eternal life.

We experienced his love, and peace, and joy.

The problem is that for most of us, the gift of forgiveness and eternal life,

             has been making little difference in our lives,

            apart from sitting there in God's heavenly bank account."

He paused for a few minutes.

And One of his friends said, "But we are grateful for God's gifts to us.

           We thank him every Sunday for all Jesus did to make these gifts possible."

Another said, "Yet it is true. But for many of us, there has been little change in

         our lives between the time we didn't have these gifts, and now, when we do.

Perhaps this is why others find it so hard to see Christ in us,

         and so they aren't really interested in getting to know him for themselves.

How could this be? How could we have such a wonderful gift as this,

               and not let it make a difference to us?"

After more thoughtful silence, the pastor added:

          "God has given us eternal life with a home in Heaven.

         He has given us his love, comfort, peace, joy, fellowship, victory, and hope.

        God has showered us with his blessings.

But what are we doing with all these blessings?

Are we just keeping them stored away in our bank account in Heaven?

Or are we letting these riches produce a change in our lives,

            and in the lives of others?

The couple who won the lottery could have experience more joy and fun,

          in their lives, or in the lives of others, but they didn't change at all.

Are we going to be just like them?

Or are we putting all the gifts and blessings God has given us, to work,

          and make a change in our lives, and in the lives of others?"

The word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah.

He was the voice of one, crying out in the wilderness

           to prepare the way of the Lord, to make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low.

The crooked shall be made smooth.

And all people shall see the salvation of God

We are also called by God to prepare the way of the Lord.

We are to help those lost in the shuffle and confusion of life

          to see the one who gives life, who gives life a purpose and meaning.

God calls us to help those lost in the deep valleys

          of despair, and loneliness, and grief.

He wants us to help those who face the mountains of fear and helplessness.

We are meant to smooth out the rough roads, so others can find the way to him.

Sometimes it is easy.     Sometimes it is much more difficult.

But we are called to prepare the way, wherever we can, however we can.

Many years ago, a circus came to town.

There was a gentleman in town who had been confined to a wheelchair for years.

But there was a circus in town and he had gone.

He had bought his ticket, but when he reached the gate he discovered

         his wheelchair was too wide to pass through it.

The circus people seemed unwilling to do anything to help.

The Sheriff arrived on the scene, and sizing up the situation,

         promptly kicked down the gate.

That gate was never again put up.

And the man went to the circuses from year to year without any difficulty.

We are called to take down the barriers, to knock down the gates,

          to fill the potholes, and level the mountains,

         so everyone can experience the presence of God who loves us.

Children often understand better than adults.

The little girl came running out of Sunday School.

Filled with joy, she told her mother she had a part in the Christmas Pageant.

During the days leading up to the Pageant, the little girl was happy and excited.

But she wouldn't tell her mother what part she was to play.

The big night arrived, and the little girl skipped into church.

When the play started, Mom looked for her daughter,

          and finally discovered the child at the very back of the scene .

She stood as straight and tall as she could.

         She held up a bright paper yellow star.

No speaking part. No moving around.

When the pageant was over, the little girl ran to her parents and exclaimed:

            “I had the main part!”

"You did?" Mom asked, confused, wondering why she thought that.

"Yes," the child exclaimed as she spun around happily.

         “Because I showed everybody how to find Jesus!”

We are all part of God's plan. And he gave us the best part:

          To show everybody how to find Jesus.

AMEN