**Sermon 1/27/19**

**Luke 1:1-25**

**Luke 1:57-80**

**Luke 2:22-40**

College sophomore Tom Bowers took a summer job as an intern

on the Governor of Michigan's staff.

He spent the first few weeks cranking out memos, returning mundane phone calls,

and straightening files.

But one day a very busy and stressed out manager asked Tom to write a public

          statement on the state's new law enforcement program.

Tom composed a brief announcement and took it to the Governor.

The next day, as he rounded the corner of a newsstand, his eyes snapped wide open.

Headlined across the front page of the Detroit News, was the announcement

he had composed. He suddenly realized that, all over the city,

people would be reading his very own words as the Governor's.

Throughout that summer, Tom discovered the power of the Governor's name.

If he sent a letter to a mayor under his own signature,

it would almost certainly be filed under "Ignore."

After all, who was Tom Bowers, sophomore summer intern?

If, however, the Governor put his name at the bottom,

the letter got instant attention anywhere in the state.

That summer Tom worked "in the name of the Governor"

– he represented the Governor.

It is one thing to represent the Governor of Michigan.

It is quite another to represent God and use his name.

Often we "Pray in the name of Jesus."

It means not what we want, but what God wants

 not what we say, but what God says.

We never find God asking people to dream up what they want to do for him.

Without doubt, the most important factor in each Biblical situation

was not what the individual wanted to do for God.

The most important factor was what God was about to do.

And when God does something, we begin to Experience God.

John the Baptist had not even been conceived in his mother's womb

when God made plans about what John would do.

He would be the voice of one crying out in the wilderness to prepare

the way of the Lord.

The Gospel of Luke provides us with the most details about John,

and tells us the story about Simeon and Anna.

Simeon had been patiently waiting for a very long time to see the Messiah.

Daily, he would go to the temple to worship God, to watch and wait.

In the temple, as Simeon stood there holding the Messiah, he said,

"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace.

With my own eyes I've seen your salvation.

A light to the non-Jewish nations, and of glory for your people Israel."

Anna the prophetess was also there, a daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher.

She was by now a very old woman.

She had been married seven years and a widow for eighty-four.

She never left the Temple area, worshiping night and day, fasting and praying.

At the very time Simeon was praying, she showed up.

She broke into an anthem of praise to God, and talked about the child

to all who were waiting expectantly for the freeing of Jerusalem.

God acted, and God has plans for his people,

how we are to live, and what we are to do.

John the Baptist was, "the one who would prepare the way."

John was God's messenger who would make the paths straight,

so people could come to believe in the one who would follow.

Everything he did and said was done in the name of God.

God's plan was to use John to prepare the people of the day to recognize and accept

the Messiah when he appeared on the scene.

Like Tom Bowers, it was not John's name which was important,

what he said was important because they were God's words to the people.

God spoke to us through the lives and words of John the Baptist,

and Simeon, and Anna,

and all those who followed Jesus down through the centuries.

Jesus has that same plan in mind for us.

We, too, are meant to bear his name, and represent him to the world.

Jesus gives us his own authority and power to teach others what God has done.

Those who have not known about God and his great love for us,

need to hear the story.

And even believers need frequent reminders that God is with us.

Matthew set out to show Jesus was the Messiah promised by God.

Mark rushed headlong to the main thing – the empty tomb.

Luke gives us a Gospel of relationships: people encouraging each other,

and sharing the story of God with one another.

There are two large sections of Luke which present material found nowhere else:

Chapters 1-2 which we read this morning, and chapters 10-19.

Luke provides us with many parables not included in the other Gospels.

He selected stories which showed the relationship between God and his people;

          and people with one another.

The parables he included show the limitless love of God for everyone in need.

God changed the world through the lives of ordinary people,

          people like us, who are willing to pass on the story to others,

people who care about others and are willing to help whenever we can.

Tolstoy, the great Russian writer, was walking along a street one day

when a beggar stopped him and pleaded for alms.

The great Russian searched through his pockets for a coin, but found none.

Regretfully he said to the beggar, "Please don't be angry with me, my brother,

but I have nothing with me. If I did I would gladly give it to you."

The beggar's face lit up with a smile and he replied,

“You have given me more than I asked for. You have called me brother.”

The book of Luke helps us to build such relationships with one another.

It shows us how to relate and help one another, even when it seems we have nothing.

We are all a part of God's plan.

We were in God's plan even before the time of our conception and birth.

We are living God's plan when we: witness, love others, feed the hungry,

visit the shut-ins and the lonely, give drink to the thirsty,

provide for the homeless, encourage the hurting.

God will work in our lives as far as we let him.

There is always a way to help each other, if we are willing to love one another.

Jill is the mother of a two-year-old little girl.

She was having one of the worst mornings in her life.

The washing machine hose broke and flooded the entire laundry room.

She received a phone call from a collection company

saying a bill was past due and needed a payment as soon as possible.

She called the bank and discovered she had less than $100 dollars in her account.

The baby didn't like the oatmeal Jill gave her for breakfast.

She was playing with it, and most of it ended up on the floor underneath the table.

Some of it ended up in her hair. Some on her clothes. Some on Jill.

Her husband called and said he had a flat tire, and the engine was making strange

noises, and he was going to be late getting home that evening.

Almost at the breaking point, Jill put her head down on the table and began to cry.

When she did, her two-year-old baby looked at mommy, and then took the pacifier out

of her mouth, reached over and put it in her mommy's mouth.

All of us have had those kinds of days.

Even a little child knows when someone needs a little bit of help.

And often, children are very quick to do whatever they can,

 children don’t worry if it is the right thing,

children simply do whatever they can.

It really is about caring and loving one another.

A Sunday School teacher asked the students to tell the meaning of loving-kindness.

After a few moments of quiet, a little boy jumped up and said,

"Well, if I were hungry, and someone gave me a piece of bread,

that would be kindness.

But if they put a little jam on it, that would be loving-kindness."

John teaches us how to prepare the way for others to encounter Jesus.

Whenever we do, whatever we can, however small it seems to be,

          that is loving-kindness.

That is God's plan, and we are part of it.

AMEN