

12/9/2018

“HOPE – for Crooked Roads and Rough Ways”

Scripture: Luke 3:1-6; Malachi 3:1-4

2nd Sunday of Advent

Theme: By turning our hearts and lives to God, trusting that if we do our part in preparing his way, Christ will come and bring salvation.

I once saw a TV news piece about a retired team of railroad workers: it was all black, working on track maintenance. Their main job was to straighten crooked tracks, so that when the trains came, they would not falter or derail. It was hard work. There was one man who made and sang a new song each day for all the men to work by as a unified, coordinated whole team together . . . It was a menial task that gave the men a sense of purpose and satisfaction. And if that work hadn't been done, those tracks could cause the disruption of service and transportation of commerce at great cost, even injury or loss of lives.

And even in this busy season, you may have heard or seen news of the death and remembrance services of the late George H. W. Bush, the 41st President of the United States.

I didn't have time to watch much of the coverage or hear all the eulogy or news reports. But, I can imagine the great preparation for those services, from Washington D.C. to his adopted state of Texas where his body now lay in rest. I took note of the beautifully painted railroad trains which carried his body to his final resting place, and the many people who lined the tracks along the way to pay their last respects.

Long, long ago, even ages before the invention of railroads, the prophet Malachi makes reference to the coming great and terrible Day of the Lord, and the prophet Elijah, as his messenger, who will return and prepare the way by turning the hearts of the fathers to their children and children to their fathers.

He uses the imagery of the coming of a great king. In those days, “before a king made a journey to a distant country, the roads he would travel would be improved. Similarly, preparation for the Messiah was made in a moral and spiritual way by the ministry of John . . .” (NIV Study Bible, Zondervan, 1985)

† **John the Baptist came proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.**

Just before Jesus began his earthly ministry, John the son of Zechariah appeared in the wilderness in the region around the Jordan River.

Luke records in his gospel account (3:1-6):

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, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

³ *He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴ 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.**’* - not just something that John the Baptist was sent to do, but something he called all people to do.

⁵ *‘**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; ⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.**’*”

† **Advent is a time when we become more keenly aware of our lives and relationships.**

The Season of Advent, waiting for the coming of Christ, is a special time of preparation.

Perhaps because of all the preparation (cleaning, buying gifts, cooking, visiting, entertaining, etc.), it’s also a time when we become more keenly aware of our lives and our relationships. We become more mindful of our own “valleys” of despair, disillusionment and doubt.

We may ascend mountain tops and have wonderful peak experiences, only to come back down to reality after the fun and festivities are over. The mountains that we face may bring us up for a while, but there may also be mountains of seemingly insurmountable obstacles of environment or upbringing in our lives.

In the season of Advent, we acknowledge the “crooked places” in our lives and routines that can make us meander about aimlessly or get us off the straight and narrow path to God’s kingdom – that can even derail us from our heavenly destination.

We confess to those “rough ways” of self-centeredness, conceit, pride and arrogance which can be harmful or hurtful to ourselves or have at times gotten us in trouble.

We all have those places from the lowest and least to the highest in position, power and wealth. And in this time of preparing to celebrate the coming of Christ Jesus as an infant baby long ago, we also prepare as we await his return in glory. We prepare by consciously being followers of Jesus, the Christ.

We prepare in Spirit, mind, and body to be a place where Christ would want to come and dwell himself. Practically impossible, you might insist. And, so, you would be right. Except for the fact that it is what Jesus himself promised. It is as the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, as quoted by John the Baptist, and recorded by Luke, “. . . **and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.**” How, you might ask?

† **The Holy Spirit leads us and helps us in turning our hearts and lives to God, trusting that if we do our part in preparing his way, Christ will come and bring salvation.**

That is the Advent promise. As we turn our hearts and lives to God, God will be there with us and for us. Christ is already here waiting to reveal himself to each of us.

In a sense though, I guess Jesus needs a “playing field”; and the Advent promise is this – if you build it, he will come. That playing field, my friends, is us; it’s you and me – individually and together.

So . . .

What are the mountains you face in your life? What are the valleys?

What are the crooked places? . . . The rough roads?

Have you turned to God, asked for forgiveness, help, and strength to prepare for Christ to come and live more fully with you and through you?

How so, or will you, this Advent and Christmas Season?

Let us prepare, with the hope he brings, for the crooked roads and rough ways of our lives, so that we too may receive Christ this Christmas!