

Here's My Wish List

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Read Luke 3: 1-6 Text *“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:*

"A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation.' "

Planning for a big event takes preparation. It takes forethought. Advertisers roll out ad campaigns prior to the release of movies, new model cars, new computer products. Toy manufactures advertise the coming new video games, etc. As a kid I spent lots of time looking at Lionel train catalogs in preparation for Christmas.

What is on your Wish List? Have you thought about what “You want” for Christmas? Have you thought about what you will give a loved one for Christmas? Have you really given thought as to what you will shop for, purchase, and spend hard earned money on? And, will the giving of that gift, really make a great amount of difference?

This is the second Sunday of Advent. Advent meaning the coming of ... For us in this context it is the coming of Jesus Christ in the incarnate form. Incarnate meaning, God being in the flesh. Advent is 4 weeks leading up to Christmas day. We are in, or should be in, the preparation mode for the coming of the Christ. Salvation comes to us.

Last week Rev. Bill Couch talked about a genealogical list . The list of Jesus’ predecessors. Today our list is of a different kind.

In the text today the author of Luke gives us some political/historical references so we know the time he is speaking of. Tiberius, Pontias Pilate, Herod, Philip, and Lysanias were some of the most deplorable and disreputable political rogues of the day. Pilate was a fence sitter who played both sides to stay in power. Tiberius resorted to falsified claims of treason to keep his opponents out of power. Herod resorted to having three of his own sons and a wife executed because he suspected a plot against him.

The religious leaders of the day are addressed as well in the text. Annas the high priest is a flunky of the Roman rulers, his son in law, Caiaphas, is a recipient of his father in laws selling out moral, ethical and religious beliefs just so he might have voice and power in the religious community.

Ugh. Most any first century Palestinian living in the region would have heartily agreed that this was one of the worst political, religious and economically harsh times,... ever. They might have said, “due to current financial and economic times, the light at the end of the tunnel will be shut off.”

Do you find it ironic that even though these political rulers are named, the word of God comes not to any of these notables, but instead to an unknown prophet living out in the wilderness? Wilderness meaning a desolate, lonely, foreboding, inhospitable & hostile place.

Enter John the baptizer, son of Zechariah as foretold in the Book of Isaiah chapter 40:3-5. Suddenly the text goes from telling us who was the modern day president, secretary of state, governor, and area bishop, to casting light on this unknown prophet in this back woods, out of the way, quite forgettable wilderness region of the Judean desert.

I want us to look at verses 4-6 today and identify some of the key words and their meaning and implication for our lives as we prepare the way for Jesus Christ in Advent.

Verse 4, "*As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet.*" We are given information telling us where these words come from, what book they are from and who said them. "*The voice of one calling in the desert.*" Or in the NRSV translation, "*crying out in the wilderness.*" I like "wilderness" better than desert. Each of you at one time or another has been in a wilderness place. A place where you felt conflicted, unsure, maybe fearful. Perhaps you are the wilderness voice of reason and stability in a hostile work place. Maybe you have felt cut off from your prayer life or God. The wilderness is a lonesome place. It is a place where God can work in our lives shaping and forming us to be a called people, a faithful people, and a different people. John is in this same place.

Note: he is NOT in town or on the courthouse steps where he will get lots of exposure. No, many of the "churched" people didn't; want to hear John's message. God has placed John in the wilderness where he makes his voice heard for those who are listening. In the wilderness you have fewer distractions. You can be tuned to God readily.

Interesting that as we have moved through our *Impossible Dreams* series, there are some of you, many of you, who have heard the voice of the Lord calling out to you from "wilderness" places. Some of you have become involved in our **Change for Children** ministry at local schools. Some are feeding folks at mission sites. Some are collecting clothes; some are providing clothing and gifts for families at Christmas. Some are exploring mission service trips to New Mexico, New Orleans, Mexico, Africa, Dominican Republic, and Guatemala.

Some are hearing God's voice speak in the power of the Spirit to buy someone lunch, to purchase groceries, to serve the one in need. You are being moved OUT of your comfort zones in the **scary, life changing wilderness** that God has set before us.

If you have travelled a mountain road in West Virginia or New Mexico or Colorado, you know how your speed is restricted, right? The fastest way from point A to Point B is a straight line. Luke 3:4 "*Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*" God is saying, "Follow and stay on the path I have lined out for you." Sure the road may be curvy, but the call, the path, the direction is straight. Straight in walking and aligning with God. Kings would only travel on the best roads in Jesus' time. Before a King traveled, the roads would be touched up. Curves removed, low spots filled, high places brought low. Thus making the kings route one of directness and sureness.

Look at verse 5 and note the repeated words. "Every." **Every** valley and **every** mountain. Not some, not part, not just a few. **Every** valley will be filled in; **every** mountain will be made low. When that happens there is a leveling effect. What...? **All** have the same opportunity to hear the words of the Prophet John calling people to repentance. **ALL**.

There is no barrier that is too high, or too low that restricts anyone from hearing the Good News of Jesus Christ. Luke 3:6.” And **ALL** flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

Prepare the way, fix the road to your heart, listen to the leveling, the ameliorating, the equalizing opportunity that **all** have in preparing for the coming of the Lord.

God is working through the writer of Luke/Acts to tell us, that God wants **everyone, everywhere** to hear, to see, to have the chance to find out about Jesus Christ.

And the crooked made straight, and the rough ways made smooth. And all flesh, all mankind, all humanity will see the salvation of God.

A key word here. **All**. All means total, all means without missing one. Like telling your child, “I want you to eat ALL of that helping of Brussels sprouts.” Then the bargaining would begin. “Dad, how about just one bite? One and a half?” “ No son, all.” All means all.

We are being challenged in this text. Right here, right now, this very moment. Do we see the gospel of Jesus Christ as only limited to people who look, act, think, and dress, like me? Do we really mean all are invited to Christ? Prepare your hearts.

Over the past few months we as a church have been moving in God’s Spirit to reach out, to connect, to lift up those who God has put in our paths. The poor, the disposed, the homeless, the hungry, those in need of restoration, and healing. You see church; the redemptive events that began with John the Baptizer in an isolated backwater corner of Judea were, by God’s perfect design, the beginning of the fulfillment of God’s concern for the salvation of ...”ALL Flesh.” All humanity, all mankind, everybody. God wants all of his people to come to know him. But as people who are given free will, we can accept, or reject the gift, the offer, the invitation of salvation.

Typically for many of us, our tendency is to draw a circle and draw it where we limit God’s activity to the ones we know, and what we can understand. We will limit our causes to the ethical and social issues important to **us**. But as I read the scriptures, particularly the Book of Luke, I am convicted, I am chastised, and I am convinced that ALL really means ALL people are invited to the gift of salvation only found in Jesus Christ.

God is working in this church at Advent preparing hearts and minds to be in service to all God’s people in some fashion. Some have stepped out to work with the homeless. To work at the ROK, at the South Plains Food Bank, at the Clothes Closet, at Asbury UMC on Sunday nights feeding folks. Here is a video clip about God’s people being the hands and feet of Christ. (Video of Jim Taylor, CB Carlson)

You see, John the Baptizer is challenging each of you, and me, to prepare our hearts to accept Christ’s offer to be the Church. Jesus’ ministry in Luke, and the spread of the church in the Book of Acts is the story of God’ challenging his people to confront social, ethnic, economic, political, and racial barriers to the spread of the Gospel. We are to be about battling all types of injustice, we are called to confront evil where we find it.

All flesh is about including those groups of people who are not present in our churches today.

MY wish list for this Christmas is not another theological book to read from the book store, it is not a new tie, a new shirt. My wish, my hope, my desire is that as God’s redemptive work is still in flux,

in process, that all humanity will hear the Good News of Jesus Christ. You see God's redemptive work in our broken works is not yet fully realized. John the Baptizer serves as a role model for the church. The Gospel of Jesus Christ announces not only what God has done through Christ, but also what God is still in the process of doing. Just like in our Communion meal, we recall what God in Jesus did for us in the past, took our sins and died in our places so we might be forgiven and made righteous. We think of what Jesus is doing on earth among us, and we think about what Jesus will continue to do for ALL humanity in the future.

John was a harbinger, a forerunner, one who brought the "**look what's coming**" message to a people in need of salvation.

Today, think about what is on your Wish List. Is it toys, clothes, things, stuff? Or is part of that wish list geared to preparing hearts and minds for the Christ? Preparing people that you meet through your service, your helping, your feeding, clothing, teaching, your change for children, your mission service? We close with this question: How are you helping bring the Kingdom to fruition so that all might have the opportunity to hear the Gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ?

Let's pray together: Gracious Lord we thank you for the coming of the savior Jesus Christ. The one who brings salvation, love, restoration, grace, and forgiveness to all who wish to hear. Change our hearts that we might only desire you; change our wish lists to become desires that glorify you. Give us courage, give us strength, and give us clarity and direction so that we might live for you daily as we prepare our wish list for the greatest gift. The coming of the Christ. Help us to see Christ in all flesh so that all shall see the salvation of God. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.