

Luke 3:1-6

Advent 2; December 6 & 7, 2015

Be Prepared!

We've heard a lot about preparation lately? December seems to be the season of many preparations. There are presents to be bought, cookies to be made, trees to be decorated. Three weeks from this weekend, Christmas 2015 will be over. How about that Packer game on Thursday night? The first half, it didn't look like the Packers had prepared for their game at all. 2nd half was a little better. Then there was the last play of the game... how do you prepare for a play like that? Then there were the tragic events that happened in San Bernardino, California. I can't even imagine what that tragic scene looked like. I can't imagine what the victims' families are going through. I can't imagine what the law enforcement officers and investigators are seeing. As much as any person or agency might try, there are just some horrific things in this world that cannot be prepared for. As we continue in the season of Advent, we are also preparing for the coming of Jesus. This morning, the Gospel writer, Luke, reminds us to **Be Prepared!**

"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."

In ancient times, when a king was going to visit a city, a herald would be sent ahead to announce to the people that their king was coming. Then the preparations would begin. Potholes would be filled. High points would be leveled. The twist and turns of the paths would be straightened. The roads would be cleaned up. The cities would be cleaned up. All this was done so that the king could reach his destination unhindered.

That was John's job in God's plan. He was the herald that told the people: *"Be Prepared! Your King is coming!"* Just as a road would be prepared for the coming of the king, John would prepare the hearts of the people for Jesus. The hearts of the people of this world have sin wrapped around them like chains or heavy ropes. Sin has our hearts so bound up that there is no possibility that we can set ourselves free. There would be only way that could happen. God would need to *FORGIVE* sin. The word that John uses in our text for **"forgiveness"** means to *"let go"* or *"to release."* It is much stronger than just throw another coat of paint on something to just quickly cover it up from sight. It is much more than just *"photo-shopping"* a picture to make something look better than it is. It is much more than just pretending that sin isn't there anymore. People needed to be set free from sin. Like a prisoner, who was held in a prison with no chance of getting free, God would need to unlock and open the door.

Maybe it isn't by accident that God would choose this area for John the Baptist to do his work in preparing the hearts of people for Jesus. It's a wilderness. It is a desert. There are ravines. Even though there are some signs of life along the banks of the Jordan because of the water in the river, it is not sparkling clean water. It is muddy and unclean. It isn't pretty.

Sounds like the human heart doesn't it? The valleys, the sharp and jagged ravines, are a way to picture how sin blocks the road to a holy God. The mountains are the sins that stand in the middle of our path that we can't get around or over. Everything is uneven. Jesus describes the human heart by nature: **"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander."** (Matthew 15:19) Not a pretty picture, is it? Not quite a National Geographic picture. By nature, we are trapped. Nowhere to go. No way to be set free.

There is only one possible way that we can escape this wilderness and trap, and his name is: JESUS. And so God sent John: **"preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."** Through the water of baptism, God brings to us all the blessings that God wants us to have. The mountain of sin is washed away. The valleys are filled in. We are brought to be children of God. Our hearts are changed and brought to repentance by the Holy Spirit doing his work in our hearts.

But it doesn't stop there. Every day of our lives he keeps supplying everything we need. He strengthens our faith. He provides us with hope. He helps us show the fruits of our faith in what we do. We need Him. Just like a road in the

desert, if it is not maintained, it will be taken back by the wilderness. Satan would love to take us back so that we once again are trapped in the wilderness of sin. He would love to have sin once again become those mountains that we cannot get around.

With Christ, you and I can stand up to the Devil so that he can't bind us to sin again. Jesus has the answer for every ravine, mountain, hill and twisted and uneven path that is found in our hearts. That little baby lying in the manger will be doing all that work as he will eventually travel to the cross on Calvary.

In this season of Advent, we look forward to that coming of Jesus. It is through his work, that we are prepared for the glories of heaven. We are constantly making preparations in our life, whether it is family celebrations for Christmas or supper tonight. There are things in this world that we can prepare for and there are things that we can never be prepared for. But there is one thing that is certain – God has prepared us for heaven through faith in Jesus Christ. May we all give thanks that we are prepared in Jesus. Amen.