

## God on the Move

Luke 3:1-6

I don't know about you, but it seems that this past summer, that road crews flourished! No matter what direction you took a road crew was sure to be blocking part of or the entirety of the road!

Although road closures can feel extremely annoying at the time, the result is usually a cleaner, clearer, smoother road! They smooth out the bumps. They remove the potholes from the winter before. They get rid of stray gravel. They smooth sharp edges. Ever drive on one of those perfectly new roads? You almost feel exhilarated. Driving feels easy. For those who spend a good deal of time on the road, the world feels brand new!

And the best part of that new road? No more detours! You can drive straight through!

This is the kind of "new beginning" that John the Baptist, announces during this second Sunday in advent before the appearance of Jesus! We learn from Luke that it was in the 15th year of the rule of Emperor Tiberius. Pontius Pilate was Governor over Judea. Herod was ruler over Galilee. His brother Philip ruled over Ituraea and Trachonitis. Lysanias ruled over Abilene. Annas and Caiaphas were high priests! All this background is to pinpoint the timing of John's call and subsequent announcement to "clear the way" for the Lord!

Luke tells us that John went all "throughout the region along the Jordan River calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins." This, Luke tells us, was the fulfillment of the Isaiah scroll:

A voice crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.

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, and all

humanity shall see the salvation of God!"

Repentance—it's one of those words that we usually deem kind of "old fashioned." We don't talk much about repentance anymore. And yet, it was "the" central theme of John's message! And it would be the central theme of Jesus' message too!

Everything begins with repentance!

While in the Hebrew scriptures, the idea of repentance involves "turning back" toward God, in the Greek New Testament, the word *metanoia* typically means to "change your mind," to make a complete "re-set," to leave your past condition behind and to re-condition your brain toward living a different future. It involves putting your mind and heart in the condition of being prepared to receive God's grace. It's a profound commitment to align with God's will for your life. This is the kind of definition that John must have drawn upon when announcing Isaiah's prophecy. In fact, it's the kind of definition of repentance that Isaiah must have imagined as well!

Repentance isn't a mere sloughing over of one's past or misdeeds. You know what happens when you do a "quick fix" on a road. In no time at all, it's back to being treacherous and bumpy.

Repentance means a deep re-conditioning of the entire road. You must dig deeply into the dirt, chuck out the stumbling stones, remove the layers of debris and damage, and replace it with brand new material. Whether it be concrete, pitch, or stone that brand new road can now get you where you're intending to go.

Sometimes, we look at John's call for repentance and baptism as a quick affirmation. But in fact, that's not how road repair works.

It's not a quick process. Repentance sometimes takes a good long while, because it requires us to go through some messiness, some digging around in our most secret internal places, some removal of unhealthy impediments, and some filling in of holes, those empty places that have felt too hard to patch. And for a while, you may need to take some detours in your chosen path. But when God gets to work on your heart and spirit, it's best to take that time. For when you emerge, you will feel brand new! And you'll find that life's path has become easier and straighter.

John's call is in a sense a "two-way" street. We are called to "prepare the way, to make his paths straight." We must not block God's entryway to our hearts. We must be willing to allow God to work on our souls. To do the "soul-work" that we require to receive God's grace. This is our part in repentance! We must remove the rocks and stones and impediments that keep God at bay, unable to enter in.

The second part of the covenant then is God's: Every valley shall be filled. Every mountain and hill shall be made low. The crooked shall be made straight. The rough ways will be made smooth! All humanity will see the salvation of God!

Once you allow God in, God will begin God's healing reparations on our heavy hearts, our sagging spirits, our ragged road ahead:

Are you feeling down and defeated? Do you feel you have a hole in your heart that no one has been able to fill? God will fill that gap in your life! God will complete that missing piece!

Do you feel angry or bitter? Has your grief made you hard, prickly, or heavy-hearted? Do you struggle with a past that seeks to consume you? Have you built fortresses of protection around yourself that no one can vanquish? God will smooth your rough exterior and allow you to be vulnerable and feel loved and loving again.

For God has come not to "judge the world," as Jesus told us, but to "save it"! When God comes into your life, your heart, your soul, you will see and know God's healing touch! And your life will never be the same.

This is John's good news. This is the news we celebrate in this time of advent! This is the meaning behind the birth and incarnation of Jesus!

God has come to repair the world! And "all humanity will see God's salvation!"

There is no soul too wretched for God to heal. There is no heart too damaged for God to repair.

There is no road too rocky for God to clear. There is no one beyond God's loving care.

It may take some time. It may mean a few detours along the way. But the results will always be worth it!

This advent season, may you open your heart to God's gift.