

## Prepare The Way

Text: Malachi 3:1-4

Philippians 1:3-11 (Series C. 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent)

Luke 3:1-6

As it is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah: "Someone is shouting in the desert: "Get the road ready for the Lord; make a straight path for him to travel! Every valley must be filled up, every hill and mountain levelled off. The winding roads must be made straight, and the rough paths made smooth."

Let us pray:

Highways, Motorways, Autobahn are great, they enable us to get where we want quicker, avoiding towns and anything that would hold up our progress.

Motorways provide smooth traveling – no dirt roads, no slow up hill climbs, no getting stuck behind semi-trailers and unable to pass, no windy and dangerous roads, no roundabouts, no frustration, just change lanes and away we go.

I recall what the road between Vernon and Hope. BC. was like in the days before the freeway was built. One lane going each way. I remembered the slow traveling, long lines of traffic, the impatience and frustration as we slowly moved along stuck behind a caravan or heavy vehicle unable to pass because of on-coming traffic.

Taking as twice as long to get from one place to another. Then the Coquihalla motorway was built. Now as we sail down the motorway enjoying a hassle free trip the thoughts of those frustrating trips are a distant memory, that is, until the motorway is choked with vehicles during the holidays.

During my internship Susan and I lived in Vernon, BC when the motorway was built between Vernon and Kelowna. We witnessed as the landscape took on a dramatic change.

For months, men, women, and machinery push and shove earth to build up the hollows, cut through hills and mountains, taking out the corners and curves and making the road flat, straight and smooth.

Hills were demolished, gullies filled in, twisting roads made straight and flat. Tunnels were dug under hills to make a straight and smooth motorway into Hope, BC. After a lot of work, what was once *very windy* and *dangerous* has become safe and quick.

Our text talks about making a *Freeway Highways, Motorways, Autobahn*. John the Baptist quotes Isaiah. The Old Testament prophet is talking about people who are lost in a strange land. The people of God had been captured by the Babylonians, their cities and their beloved temple had been destroyed.

They ended up in a miserable situation. They were fully aware that it wasn't just bad luck or fate or chance that had landed them in this strange place.

They had sinned and turned away from God's ways. They had been warned by God's messengers, the prophets. They had ignored the word of the Lord and now they were paying the price. And they knew it.

Now the prophet is saying to those in exile that they are going home, but before they can go across the wilderness a motorway must be made, *"every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, and rough ways made smooth."*

All obstacles, which block the way back home and make the return difficult, must be removed. God will reveal his glory and lead his people home. I don't believe that Isaiah is talking about a modern motorway as we know it; he is talking about preparing for the coming of God to lead them home.

Their sin had caused their exile in the strange land of Babylon and now the way must be made straight. Today we heard how John the Baptist preached out in the wilderness. He is calling the people of God to prepare the way for the Lord, to get the road ready for the coming of the Lord, make it straight and level and smooth.

John isn't talking about making a motorway from one town or a city to another; he is talking about a highway where all obstacles have been removed for the coming of the Saviour into our lives.

He is urging us to make smooth the rough places in our lives, fill in the hollows, make low the mountains and hills that would prevent us from welcoming Jesus into our hearts and our lives.

John urges everyone to bring in the heavy earth moving equipment to move away all obstacles and level the path. The name of this heavy equipment is the 'R' word Repentance – it clears away all the rubbish and anything else that blocks the coming of the Lord. *Repent*, in other words, turn away from every obstacle, from what we know is wrong but we enjoy it anyway.

- turn away from greed, selfishness, unkindness and thoughtlessness.
- turn away from anger and a judgmental attitude that causes harm to others.
- turn away from everything that is contrary to the way God wants us to live as his people.

Clear away everything that stands between God and us. That's not an easy thing to do, we all know that. It's near impossible, in fact it is impossible, for us to turn around our lives just by sheer will power. We as humans enjoy certain sins.

We just can't help it, saying or thinking in ways that are harmful and hurtful. All these things are part of who we are as humans. It doesn't matter how hard I try to change this it keeps coming back. But the Good News is that:

- the more we come to know God; the closer our relationship with our Lord;
- the more we study his word in the Bible; the more we see the love that God has for us;
- the more we become aware of the sinful obstacles that prevent us from truly being God's people in this world;
- and the more we realize that we need God's help in levelling the hills and filling the gullies through a life of repentance.

Faith in Jesus gives us renewed eyesight. We see the obstacles and the crooked path that we have been traveling along. We see what needs to be cleared away.

Luther says in the Large Catechism, "We can never stop cleaning out what comes from old Adam (*our sinful nature*); and whatever belongs to the new person has to keep on breaking through. What is the 'old person'? He is what is born in us from Adam.

He is bad-tempered, nasty, envious, immoral, greedy, lazy, high and mighty; in fact has no faith, is a slave to every evil habit, and by nature there's no good in him. Now, when we enter Christ's kingdom, all this is meant to get less and less each day, so that, as time goes on, we become more gentle, patient, and humble, and do away with greed, hatred, envy, and pride more and more. (*Luther's Large Catechism, Lutheran Publishing House 1983 page 181*).

We all know that this is so hard to do. But God through the power of the Holy Spirit do help us. Daily we need to make straight paths and make our relationship with God something that will affect everything we say and do. Daily we need to repent, to turn away from sin, to turn our lives around.

John the Baptist called people to repent and prepare the way for the Lord. And the good news is- Jesus was coming. For us Jesus has come. He came to deal with our sin. He died to ensure that we are forgiven. Our sins are cleared away. We are renewed as his people and recreated to be the people of God.

We have been changed from self-serving and thoughtless people to people who let the love of God and their faith influence habits and do those things that make us different from the rest of the world. Along with the call for repentance is the good news of forgiveness of sin.

John the Baptist not only preached about sin, but he shouted out loud the message of God's grace and mercy. The Good News is that a baby was born to bring peace to those who are troubled by sin. The Good News is that Jesus died for us and forgives us for all the times we have slipped back into sin.

The Good News is that God comes to us in his Word and Sacraments and declares that we are made clean by the blood of Jesus. Prepare the way of the Lord. That's God Word for us today.

The theme for this week is *Peace*. As we light the second candle on the Advent Wreath, take a long, slow deep breath and remember what this preparation time is truly about. Light your own candle and read two chapters in Luke this week (there is time enough) to catch up! Slow down.

Don't move too fast. Let us listen and hear the voice of one *crying out in the wilderness* reminding us to *prepare the way of the Lord* within ourselves. Let us un-trap ourselves from the temporary, fragile, and externally imposed wrapping of this life to give *Peace* first, last, and always. We can clothe ourself in the truer *Peace* we receive when remember that the best gift *ever is knowing The Lord is with us* always.

Let's fill in every valley, make low every mountain and hill. Let's make straight the crooked roads, and make smooth the rough ways. Just as we tidy up the house, dust off the furniture, and decorate our homes for Christmas, let's prepare our hearts for the coming of the Lord. **Amen.**

December 5, 2021

**Let us pray:** O God of the Eternal Dawn and Endless Love, guide us to accept and proclaim a new baptism of repentance as we strive to put our life in Christ above all worldly pursuits, that if suddenly called, we will be ready to account for our time in this brief earthly journey. We ask through Jesus the Christ, our Glorious Savior; and the Holy Spirit, our Sanctifier; who together with You are One God, forever and ever. **Amen.**

**Prayer concerns:** *Matilda Molyneaux-Piper, Shirley Walker, Hanne Bourgeoise, Ellen Eriksen, the dire situation in BC, flood situation, Middle East & Covid -19 patients, essential and Frontline workers, Christian Aid Workers held as hostages in Haiti, Municipal elections, and Families of departed souls in recent weeks and months.*

**Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:**

- **Comfort, Comfort Now My People # 256**
- **On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry # 249**
- **Blessed Be the God of Israel # 250**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

*Jette Blair*

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

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