



Prepare the Way, Share the Gospel
Baruch 5:1-9; Luke 3:1-6
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (December 5, 2021)

The Minoru Centre for Active Living in Richmond, BC is a marvel of architecture. This community center has won an international prize for its accessibility to people who use wheelchairs. The award was presented in Cologne, Germany by the International Olympic Committee, International Paralympic Committee, and International Association for Sports and Leisure Facilities.

The Minoru Centre is a wonderful example of how to make a facility accessible for everyone. Those of us who are able-bodied and have never faced the structural obstacles and limits of those who are differently abled may have no clue of how frustrating and discouraging those limitations may be. Knowledge facilitates compassion.

Luke, doctor and evangelist, is aware that the good news of God's salvation does not come in a vacuum. Just as he has described the socio-political context of Jesus' birth, Luke reminds his audience of the names of the emperor, governor, and other political and religious rulers of the day when John the Baptist comes onto the scene "proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Lk 3:3). Luke seems to drill in us the concept that God's involvement is with the real world and not just with the individual soul. So he describes in detail the political landscape of the times. This provides a backdrop for one of Luke's main points: John the Baptist, and the one he proclaims, differs greatly from the rulers of the day, both in appearance and in focus.

John is not satisfied with the way things are, and his words help prepare us for the coming of one who will turn the world upside down. He borrows from the prophet Isaiah a passage well known to the people of Israel:

'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 flesh shall see the salvation of God.'

Prophets of all times have spoken divine rebukes meant to contradict the social reality the dominant class had come to create and sell (or impose) as the best gift from God after creation. But against the political, economic, and military plans of the ones on top, God's vision for liberation and salvation for all people comes as a whiplash to those who sit on thrones of wealth, power, and influence, and is presented with determined words.

The prophet Baruch echoes those words of hope depicting the day the Israelites will return home from exile as a day of God's glory. From God's perspective, no created being should suffer: where there is lacking, there will be abundance; where there is greed, violence, and corruption, there will be humiliation.

"Advent is a good time to remember that the Bible we read and reverence is a wilderness text. A text borne of trauma, displacement, and loss. The ancient writers who penned sacred scripture — and the vast majority of characters who populate its pages — were not, by and large, history's winners. They were the persecuted. The dislocated. The enslaved. The desperate. They lived through periods of famine, war, plague, and natural disaster. They suffered starvation, violence, barrenness, captivity, exile, colonization, and genocide. They were, in countless ways, the wretched of the earth. Brave, lonely voices, crying in the desert.

But what did they cry? They cried their sorrow, of course. In the shadowed valleys of the wilderness, they cried their rage, fear, horror, and pain. But here's the remarkable thing: they also cried their hope. Their fierce, muscular hope in a God who cares. A God who vindicates. A God who saves. Something about the wilderness experience birthed in them a capacity for profoundly life-changing hope. Salvific hope. Hope beyond hope."¹

We all have the potential to "over-spiritualize" the Bible and our faith, so that they become disconnected from the real needs of the world around us. There is the danger of minimizing our spiritual life to something between me and my God. But God is not satisfied with a faith that looks like a vertical line only nor with empty worship; God expects our faith to include those around us in a horizontal reach. The prayers the Church has taught us never start with "I" and end with "me." They always start with "We" and end with "us." It's important to start our journey with Jesus on that personal level and it is equally important that our faith expands to include all of God's creation.

Somehow along the way, we have blindly overvalued our individualism and brought it into our relationship with our Lord. But from the very start the Bible has revealed God's intention to save the whole world which God loves. The incarnation of God in Jesus is about God's passion to reach each and every human being, indeed all creation, and restore them to their primordial Beauty, the image in which they were created. Rebellion and stubbornness will never discourage God from pursuing us and calling us into an intimate relationship with the Father through Jesus in the Spirit.

John provides a warning about ignoring the truth about our corporate sinfulness and the brokenness in the world. But John also repeats the promise that God ultimately will not settle for the way things are in the world, and that God's salvation will be made known in the one who is to come: Jesus.

Each of us are called to prepare the way of the Lord. John is on fire with hope for God's coming, confident that the Savior of the world will come at last with power. John refuses to settle for apathy, despair, phony optimism, or living grimly in an unjust status quo. He faces the evils of the world: he grieves, protests, and does everything in his power to bear witness to God's call for repentance, conversion, and transformation. In the end,

¹ Debbie Thomas, A Voice Crying, commentary to the 2nd Sunday of Advent, Year C.

he's willing to endure imprisonment and even death for the sake of the light that is coming into the world.

We are warned against tokenism. Again, the ancient prophets have consistently played an alarming bell whenever people were giving God lip service. In our piety, we may even be sincere in our generosity and respond whole heartedly to the needs of the world: feeding the hungry, sheltering the houseless, protecting the orphan and the widow, and nursing the injured. I am constantly challenged to remember that my generosity needs to go beyond the immediate emergency to possibly address and do my part to resolve the root causes of hurtful systems. In addition to our financial donations, we can pick up the phone and call our political leaders; we may also choose to invest our money in socially sensitive institutions and organizations.

Many are familiar with the phrase "Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary, use words," often attributed to St. Francis. God has a mission, and that mission has a Church. What a privilege to be made part of God's plan. God's vision is that "valleys shall be lifted up, rough ways made smooth." Individually and as a Church we are called to contribute to the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Borrowing the words of Pr. Rob Carlson, Assistant to the Bishop of the FL-Bahamas Synod, "We have an incredible opportunity, as individuals and congregations, to make an important difference to a very under-served deaf community via the new Palms Deaf Church. PDC will be an impact-maker, including for the people we don't yet know in our own locations. [VIDEO: Palm Deaf Church](#) (WARNING: The video starts with no sound to render the silence deaf people hear when attending a public function.)

Again, Pr. Carlson explains his hopes for the new mission start: "The anticipation is that, in this coming year, PDC will open the doors for so many to the Kingdom of God by means of our internet and social media connections."²

The proof that God loves us is in Jesus Christ, who loved us even before we would be aware of and renounce our sin. He, who has found us in the ditch of a road weighed down by our sin, shoulders that sin for us all the way to the cross while leaving us in the caring and healing hands of the Spirit until he comes again.³

Let that become a teaching pattern for us, picking up those around us crashed by sin and loving them into healing. Jesus, the wounded healer, loves us, wounded sinners, into a new calling: love your friend but even more so, love your enemy.

Picture your heavy heart, wounded by sin. Recall to your mind the most horrific sin you have committed. Jesus is ready to lift that off your shoulders; let him love you. Savor the peace of being brought home, held in his arms. You are God's beloved, the glorious day of the Lord is at hand. Let your heart be filled with tears of joy. You may boast in the grace and peace with God obtained through the Lord Jesus Christ. Would you let your neighbor know how much God loves you? Would you let your neighbor know how much love is available for him, for her, for the world?

² If the Spirit moves you to help in this new effort for the kingdom, write a check to Nativity with Palms Deaf Church or PDC in the memo line and place it in a green envelop.

³ See [Romans 5:1-11](#) and [Luke 15:11-32](#)

Now picture in your mind those who drive you off the deep end: the obnoxious, the hater, the unlovable, the alienated brother, the estranged daughter. Instead of telling them how they should live their lives, would you love them into a new and restored life? Can you share the caring of God, the generous amount of love you have received with them? Loving them will cause you to suffer. Paul says you may boast in that suffering as well, because that suffering, I reckon, means you are on the right path, on the Way with Jesus.⁴ Can you swallow your pride? Can you savor the love?

Maybe you are here because your neighbor invited you. Maybe you are here because this is where your friends are. Maybe you are here because you owe it to God or think worship is what you ought to be doing.

May you learn to be here because you want to, because you have chosen to let Jesus closer to your heart.

This may be your last Advent and your last Christmas. Make it count. Amen.

⁴ See [Acts 18:25](#)