

The Second Sunday in Advent  
December 4, 1988

Text: Luke 3:1-6  
Elijah and Elisha  
John and Jesus

Board verse on the sign in front of our church:

The word of God cuts a highway  
from our exile and separation  
to a holy land of new promise.

Perhaps what strikes me the most about our Gospel lesson is that the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the desert. Yes, the Word of God came. Where it was possible to suppress it everywhere - and the rulers, Herod and Philip, Lysanias, Pontius Pilate, Tiberias Caesar, and even the high priests, Annas and Caiaphas certainly tried their utmost to suppress the Word of God - John the Baptist was out in the desert, and the Word of God came to him, and all these rulers could not suppress it.

What strikes me in Advent, when John the Baptist is placed before us every year and always prepares the way of Jesus, is the power of the Word of God. It casts down the mighty from their thrones, and exalts those of low degree. God's Word takes the people who are nothing, and makes them something. God's Word takes the people who are something, and makes them like nothing.

John comes before the Day of the Lord. Like Elijah came before Elisha, who has double the first prophet's spirit, John the Baptizer, comes before Jesus the Christ. Jesus proclaims the day of the Lord. John prepares the people so that they see the day breaking. By preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, John gets the people prepared for the one who is the Word of God become flesh to dwell amongst us. The Word of God came to John - and like the first great prophet Elijah - he is the last great prophet Elijah - he is the last great prophet - the second Elijah - and he prepares the way for Christ - who does not only proclaim the Word of God, but who is the Word of God, the Word of God become flesh, who raises up mighty works of salvation in the Day of the Lord.

The passage from Isaiah speaks of a highway. It speaks of building a road - with tractors, trucks, bulldozers, cement mixers, tar, pavement, lines - a super highway inches slowly along so God's holy people can travel securely to the place of salvation, to the place where they see the face of God, to the place where Jesus is sharing his love, gently carrying lost sheep on his shoulders, back to their homes, healing the sick, bringing peace and reconciliation - bringing the knowledge of God into the hearts of the people, and all God's love.

In terms of Isaiah - you have a Hebrew people locked as prisoners in Babylon. Wild mountainous country lay between Niniveh and the hills of Babylon, and the Holy Land and Jerusalem. And Isaiah proclaimed a new Exodus, a royal and divine highway that God's Word would cut from Babylon to

Jerusalem - and a Holy People would make a new Exodus back to the promised land.

We ourselves are also in a Babylonian exile. And we need the Word of God to come. We need John the Baptist to cut a new highway to the dominion which Jesus rules.

Look at our wretched exile. Can't you see the Joel Steinberg, Hedda Nussbaum trial as a sign of a land of exile? The land that Jesus rules, the Holy Land, is one where children are "suffered" to come unto him. They are held up, celebrated, loved and cherished. Jesus' heart goes out in gentleness and tenderness to the children. Don't think you'll enter his Kingdom unless you become like one of these children.

And in our exile children age socked in the face and abused until they die of the broken bones and bruises. The woman who should guard the life of the child, is completely terrorized and cowed by the man who brutally smashes a little daughter's dear life out of her. What an exile we live in! How many abused and murdered children does that little seven year old represent? And who will build us a highway into the Holy Land where children are loved and cherished and gently born in the arms of their parents until they themselves become gentle and protective parents and grown ups?

The Word of God will cut the highway. The rough places, the rough people will be made gentle, the crooked will be made straight, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Look at us. On this Advent, we too are in a land of exile, and we need a highway cut through some very rough terrain to get to the Holy Land of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Look at our drugged up society. Look at our alcoholic society. Look at our society addicted to crack and cocaine and other hallucinogenic drugs. Think of all the nursing homes pumping our senior citizens with all manner of drugs, of the doctors being drug pushers that put the mobsters who sell crack on our street corners to shame; think of the power that alcohol has on our people - and you will see that the Word of God needs to come to us as it did to the last Elijah, John the Baptist - and a divine highway has to be cut to a drug free society - caught up in the Holy Spirit and liberated, saved from getting brain damage from crack, heroin, alcohol and other chemical addictions. In the Holy Spirit the people who always need to be high, will be brought down and given two feet to plant down on the ground. The valley of despair will be raised up to give a level area of hope, and a way shall be made to people living in the Spirit of God in a Holy land that is crime free and miracle ridden, ruled by Jesus through the hearts of those who look up to his cross, where in his utter helplessness, he helped us all, and became our true helper, our savior. And in the life he gave for us he spread a love so contagious that you and I also catch it.

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Listening to the stories of alcoholics and drug addicts - especially the ones who have gotten Aids - I can see the power of death rearing up very powerfully among us. What we need is the Word of God to come unleashed in all his Baptizing power so that a divine death comes to this power of death, and a royal highway of life gets constructed before us. And this highway, constructed by the powerful Word of God, leads to the Word of God become flesh in Jesus Christ our Lord.

In this Advent season - let us pray for the Word of God to construct a path that our feet might tread - from our sin to his righteousness, from our darkness to his light, from our crimes to his miracles, from our hate to his love. May Gods Word bring us down whenever we are high - may it bring us very low - may it bring us so low, that we realize only God can help us - and let us then walk on that royal highway that God makes for us, let it make our crooked ways straight, our rough ways even, bring down our mountains - raise up our valleys, so that all flesh even in our generation will see the salvation prepared for us by God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.