

“The Gift of God’s Word” written by Robbie Schwartz

Monday, December 10, 2018

In Luke 3:1-6, lost among the historical context of the first part of the reading, is the fact that the Word of God came to John in the wilderness. It seems almost ironic that even so many centuries ago, without the so called advances in technology of today, that God chose to speak to John in absence of civilization. God’s word gets lost rather easily today since He doesn’t post on Facebook. It is perhaps in our most private moments, when we can find one of those seemingly fleeting moments of respite from the chaos of life, that we are able to bring ourselves closest to God. Of course in His infinite wisdom God knows this and tries to draw us to a “moment in the wilderness” of today, though we are likely to miss most of these attempts. It is easy for us to miss the voice of one calling in the wilderness of our lives, so it rests upon our shoulders to find those moments to bring ourselves closer to God. The wilderness is not a place of desolation but one of hope, no matter where it is found.

Tuesday, December 11, 2018

To prepare the world for the way of the Lord, the text of Luke 3:1-6 basically tells us that the world must be turned upside down. The world will need to reach almost the furthest point from what stands as reality today for us to be ready for the coming of our Lord. I admit that I will be a little disappointed to see every valley filled in and every mountain made low – though the straightened roads will be a welcome addition. But it will require re-thinking everything that we know, especially with the knowledge that what is commonplace today does not mean that it is something that will be accepted by God. Social systems and the knowledge of the day will be torn down and rebuilt in ways that will lead us to God’s salvation. Because while we repent for our sins today, the truth lies in the fact that for God we will need to have a change of mind and heart so that we are worthy of serving Him.

“The Gift of Good News” written by Vernon Mukhlall

Wed Dec 12 God’s Advent Has Changed Everything

“Strengthen you the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.” Isaiah 35: 3 – 6(a). Isaiah describes the time of happiness when God will come to deliver the Jews from their enemies. The images of these verses are those of joy and exultation. These verses accurately describes what the Messiah, Jesus Christ, will do and what He literally did. Image the joy of those whom Christ heals - the blind sees the light and the things around, the deaf hears the sound of human voices, the dumb verbally expresses himself so that people can understand, and the lame recovers the use of his limbs. It is predicted that this will be part of Jesus’ ministry (Matt 11: 5). Christ’s physical healing foreshadows His miracles of spiritual healings when He opens our eyes, ears and hearts to understand His Gospel and to see the activities of God in, through, and around us. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to bring about spiritual changes in our lives – Christlike character and stronger faith – so that in turn, through our words and actions, we may bring God’s healing power to others. Prayer: Lord, I have weaknesses which prevent me from living the life that you want from me. I humbly ask that you turn my weaknesses into strengths and fulfill in me wholeness of body, mind, and spirit. Amen.

Thu Dec 13 The Holy One In Our Midst

“Sing unto the LORD; for he has done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, you inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of you.” Isaiah 12: 5 – 6. When we are excited and seen jumping up for joy, it expresses that something great has happen in our lives at that moment, like receiving the good news that you have passed that examination that you have worked hard for, or got that promotion that you really needed. The Psalmist records that once God was angry with His people. They were scattered in the heathen world. But now God is bringing salvation to the remnant of God’s people. God has shown Himself great and worthy of praise for the deliverance of His people from captivity. Now the Psalmist is calling on the people to exalt, to shout, and to make a noise that is expressive of their joy for God’s salvation. Christ, through His death and resurrection, has brought God’s salvation to us. Christ is ever present with us to defend, comfort, lead, direct, and strengthen us. How should we show our gratitude? We are to “cry out and shout” with joy because there is no condemnation for us who are in Christ. Prayer: Heavenly Father, you have called me to praise your name each day. Grant me the strength and courage to exalt and glorify your name and to sing praises to express my joy for your saving grace. Amen.

Fri Dec 14 Do Not Trample The Needy

“And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answered and said unto them, He that has two

coats, let him impart to him that has none; and he that has food, let him do likewise. Then came also tax collectors to be baptized, and said unto him, Teacher, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise asked of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.” Luke 3: 10 – 14. Recently my water heater broke down and I had to replace it with a new one, not a good time when funds are low and the weather is cold. The price by a large company to replace it was very exorbitant – more than double than what a small contractor had charged me. Is this a case when one is down one experiences greater pressure which presses one further down? In preparing the way for the Lord, John the Baptist comes preaching a dynamic message which attracts multitudes of people. But he has a message for those who are powerful – those who are more affluent those who charge more than what is necessary, and those who intimidates and accuses others falsely. In essence, what John is saying in the above verses is that they should not trample the needy. This goes against what Jesus is teaching about greatness (Luke 25: 22) and what the second greatest command is teaching us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt 22: 39). John really wants the people to repent and have a change of heart and to demonstrate it by their words and actions. We too are called to do the same. Prayer: Gracious God, sometimes I think more of myself and less of others and yet you provide enough to meet my needs and to share with others. Grant me the desire to be generous and to share with the needy the gifts that you have given to me. Help me to always remember that all that I have are your gifts to me. Amen.

Sat Dec 15 God Is Setting Things Right

“In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up its breaches; and I will raise up its ruins, and I will rebuild it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the nations, who are called by my name, says the LORD that does this.” Amos 9: 11 – 12. Sin can certainly cause someone to slip from uprightness to moral and spiritual decay and ultimately to a fallen state. The same can be true for a country in which its inhabitants indulge in sin and which could bring about the wrath of God. In both cases only the power of God can lift them from such fallen state. Because of their sinful behavior, God’s people, sometimes refer to as the Kingdom of David, were taken into exile, scattered decimated and disowned. But there were individuals among them who either remained loyal or came back to God. In these two verses, Amos had a brief word of hope that announces a glorious future for Israel and the world. “God has not cast away his people whom he foreknew” (Rom 11: 2). God has restored the Kingdom of David through Jesus Christ who ushers in the Kingdom of God which accommodates both Jews and Gentiles. People of all walks of life who believe and put their trust in Jesus Christ are welcome in God’s Kingdom. This gives us the assurance, as believers, that we are no more captives to sin and death but new life in Jesus Christ. We are living in God’s Kingdom now and will be when it is fully established at the return of Christ as our King. Prayer: O God, there are so many wrong things that are going on in the world today that too often I allow the bad news to destroy my hope that goodness is possible. Help me to remember the good news of your promise that you are in control of everything and that you are working to bring restoration in your own time. Amen.

Sun Dec 16 The Gift Of Good News

“And as the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether he was the Christ, or not; John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I comes, the thong of whose shoes I am not worthy to untie: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” Luke 3: 15 – 16. All of us live with the expectation of realizing our dreams in life. We look forward to a good job, a wonderful family, a beautiful house in a peaceful community and all the amenities which can make life enjoyable. John brings divine message to the Jews and this awakens their attention and expectation of the Messiah. For over four hundred years there was no prophet with a message from God. So, when John comes on the scene, the people question whether he is the Messiah. The people look forward to the coming of the Messiah who will ushering in justice, righteousness and peace. They were expecting to have a better life under the Messiah. John, with the humility that is characteristic of true greatness did not accept the honor paid to him. He directs the thoughts of the people to the One who is mightier than himself and who is coming soon to bring God’s salvation to the world. John pointed to his baptism which is an outward sign of their inward repentance. But the Messiah’s baptism will be with “the Holy Spirit and fire”. The Messiah, Jesus Christ, continues to bring God’s salvation to those who believe and trust in Him. Jesus is the Good News for us and the world. Prayer: Stir up the wills of your faithful people, merciful and gracious God, and open our ears to the preaching of John the Baptist, that, rejoicing in your salvation, we may bring forth the fruits of repentance through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.