

Second Sunday of Advent, Year C, Gospel

A WAY WHERE THERE IS NO WAY

Luke 3:1-6

Second Sunday of Advent

Analysis by Glenn L. Monson

1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4 as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.

5 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;

6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”



DIAGNOSIS: Advent: Wilderness Wanderings

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Our Way Is Not God's Way

"What's wrong with the way we do things?" we ask. "We've always done it this way." Oh, we know the prophet is right when he says, "'My ways are not your ways,' says the Lord." But the shortcuts to discipleship and faithfulness, the cutting of corners when it comes to sacrifice and generosity, the ways around certain requirements of obedience are just too tempting.

So we continue to travel the path with which we are most familiar, the one recommended by the world of Tiberius, Pilate, Herod, Annas, and Caiaphas.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Repentance? No Way!

John's call to prepare the way seems a bit rude. "Our paths are straight enough," we protest. "Our valleys are gentle and rolling, and our mountains are just the right height. We have no need for some spiritual bulldozer. What do you mean by implying that there are crooked places and rough places in the thoroughfares that we travel? We find the way that we travel to be quite satisfactory, thank you!" The call to repentance has no appeal to us. It is not our way.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): We Have Lost Our Way

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it," says our Lord. (Matt. 7:13). What seemed like the easy way out has led to a dead end. What looked like the right way to do things turns out to be disastrous. As the book of wisdom warns: "There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12). It turns out that the way that we travel has led us into the wilderness and we are lost. We have found ourselves alone in the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and no ruler has come forth to save us.

PROGNOSIS: The Word in the Wilderness

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): The Way, the Truth

and the Life Seeks Us Out



Suddenly, as we wander about in the wilderness, a word is heard. It comes forth seemingly out of nowhere: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). The Word made flesh has sought us out and found us in the wilderness. The Word made flesh has become the Good Shepherd who gladly leaves the ninety-nine to search out for the one who is lost. The Word made flesh, binds up our wounds, gives us food and drink, carries us upon his shoulders, and brings us home one again. We, who were lost, have been found. The One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life has claimed us! The Way of the Cross has given us life!

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): God Has His Way with Us

We now see the error of our ways. We see the crooked paths and rough roads we have been traveling and we ask the One who makes all things new to come and create a new path for us, one that will lead to life and joy for us and all people. The voices of the emperor and his minions no longer hold sway in our lives; only the Word that we first heard in the wilderness—that is our guide. Though we continue to live in the world and walk the paths of all mortals, we walk by faith, not by sight.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): We Go to the Highways and Byways

We hear the Word calling us to go out to the highways and byways and invite all to the banquet table of the king. We, who once were lost but now are found, now find ourselves eager to extend God's mercy to those who are yet in a bad way—the forgotten, the poor, the brokenhearted, those whom the world has tossed aside. We know what it's like to lose our way, and have another seek us out and bring us home, so we are compelled by God's love to extend God's love to others. The voice of one crying in the wilderness becomes our voice: "Prepare the way of the Lord," we cry.