

SERMON: "PREPARE YE... *For the Unexpected.*"

Rev. Geoff Ross, Sunday, December 19, 2021, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

[1969/world-weary/jaded/RS released a song that spoke to the frustrated/disillusioned zeitgeist//Spirit of the age: "You can't always get what you want x 3/But if you try sometimes, well, you might find You get what you need..." Lyrics/sum up the difference between desire/need:no matter what we have/still want more – not sure what we need. Truth is:Many of us/plans go wildly astray/awry searching for some personal/termproal/material achievement that'll only bring heartbreak/dissatisfaction – regret/remorse/shame:guilt. But/chorus suggests that while not getting what you wanted/expected – is truly what you need.]

Desire/wants verses needs – it's the binary path we walk as we live. "Desire:" a strong feeling of wanting to have/wishing for something to happen and, "wants:" crave/covet/wish for something one desires to possess/wishes to do/have; whereas, "needs:" a necessity/requirement/essential/basic must needed to survive/live. "Desire"/"wants" drive us toward things that we don't have – making us jealous/resentful/covetous – Gollum-like, possessive/wary/mistrustful – leading us like "a bridle leads" us "like sheep/astay (Used in the OT as a legal term:violation of law/what's right/expected/an action that is "perverse"(Ps 14:3) rebellious/disobedient, in opposition to God/God's Law) we have all turned to our own way."(Isa 30:28/53:6) Simply put: to go "astray" is to "err"(Ps 58:3) in the eyes of God/God's Law: it not only gets us lost/takes us further from where we need to be.

[Thursday's Advent Devotional(daily on FaceBook) ended with this: "Christ's incarnation teaches us that the Bible's central message isn't our search for God. It's God's search for us. Christ come down to find us, because we can't find Him. He's not lost, we are. Through his marvelous grace, we've been found. We're alive." Funny thing:Human nature/when we're lost we lie/deny it – just ask any guy while he's driving! – like Adam/Eve God called out to them!/what God does in today's reading!]

In a reading/not usually read during Advent, "Luke" provides the answers to why? With another chronological/historical 'marker,' we're fixed in the "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee,..." – so roughly 29AD – but you get the idea. We're also told the 'who' – "John son of Zechariah"(Elizabeth's leaping baby!) and the 'where' – "the region around the Jordan" – the main river flowing south from the Sea of Galilee. Not Advent cannon, but the reading describes what it is the earth had truly been "groaning" in hope for. Like God in Eden/Isaiah to God's people in Babylon before him, John – now filled with the Word of God – is calling out us/me/you/people who are hiding/frantically on the run: "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..."

[Unexpected metaphor/Road Construction – Summer2020 Preaching series: Road Trip/WWJG? talked about Roman roads – Via Maris/"The Way of the Sea" (referenced in the Isaiah prophecy!) – roads well known/used roads in Jesus' time:so was their construction! Also:Ancient Israel/when King was traveling – roads would be made:hills leveled/valleys filled/rough smooth – all at local expense/with local labour. The People knew/lived the metaphor/what it meant:Total renovation/reconstruction/restoration.]

But what was the reconstruction/roadwork that John was calling suddenly/unexpectedly calling the people to do:"Repentance." Rather than calling to us, John was calling us/you/me out, everyone with

broken bridges/potholes/roadblocks to work/remove them so the King/Lord would be welcomed into our hearts/lives. To prepare the way, John was calling for people/us to rid themselves of the barriers/obstacles/obstructions we've erected to hide from God/keep God out. Why? So, as John proclaims; *"all flesh shall see the salvation of God."* And, this was/is frightening/uncomfortable – and yet, also unexpected/good – news for everyone/*"all flesh"*/people who feel as though they're running for their lives/from a painful pain/perplexing present/a feared future train-wreck – anyone/me/you who is in need of salvation.

[“See the salvation of our God” – Luke echoes the revelation of God’s gift/promise fulfilled/John’s words remind us of:Shepherds going to “see” the baby Jesus/incarnate/God-with us(Luke 2:15)/Simeon at the Temple who says; “my eyes have ‘seen’ your salvation(Luke 2:30);later, fishermen/tax collectors/sinners/blind/lost ‘see’ God’s salvation for what it is:Good News of great joy/unexpected Gift/unmerited grace! “See”-ing implies lack of distraction/obstruction/impairment that either obscures our sight/willfully lures/leads us astray.]

And, to those/you/me/us who don't think they need to do any/have any preparations/work to do/expecting that they're/we're “in”, John warns us not to be deceived/deceive ourselves. 29/2000 years after the angels proclaimed the *“Messiah, the Lord [was born as] a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger”* John unexpectedly calls to us in our wilderness to forewarn us that we are saved by God's unexpected grace – a grace beyond our deserving/that comes through the hard work of repentance/contrition/penance/surrender to God's love/trust God's love/promises. The Good News is that not only does God fulfill His promises/also prepares our hearts/paves the way in us to receive His gift/make our salvation possible! Prepare the way/unexpected – let God's grace/love transform your heart this Christmas! Amen.