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Luke 21:25-36

December 5, 2021

Advent 2 Year C

Prepared for: Lutheran Church of Our Saviour, Greenville SC

* What is wilderness?
  + Sheffield, Pennsylvania. “The Heart of the Allegheny National Forest.”
    - Population, just over 1000 people.
    - It took us an hour to get to the nearest interstate.
    - The population density in the entire county: 46 people per square mile[[1]](#endnote-1)
      * For comparison: Greenville, SC population density is 570 per square mile[[2]](#endnote-2)
    - You didn’t drive very far from our small village before you found yourself feeling pretty isolated.
  + Most of us probably envision that kind of remote, rugged, and sparsely populated area when we hear the word “wilderness.”
  + And that, of course, seems to be exactly kind of wilderness that John the Baptist wanders through making the proclamation:
    - “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.”
* Is that wilderness—the rugged, remote, sparsely populated place—the one whose dramatic reversal John announces?
  + Short answer: No! Of course not!
  + Longer answer: There is a reason why the author of this gospel includes the names of the local political leaders.
    - Remember two weeks ago, when I said that Jesus was the consummate politician? The reversal John is preparing for is a political one!
      * And it is one that should make many of us—perhaps especially Americans—uncomfortable.
  + Moving this text into the twenty-first century, we could substitute contemporary political leaders’ names: President Joe Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, Governor Henry McMaster, Senators Lindsey Graham and Tim Scott
    - Truth: In the first century, as now, political leaders were largely wealthy, powerful and high-status people.
    - Truth: In the first century, as now, political leaders often failed to care for the poor and needy as they focused on maintaining their own power and privilege.
    - Truth: In the first century, as now, an awful lot of people lived with food insecurity, homelessness, and all of the -isms that lead to injustice.
      * Racism, heterosexism, ageism, sexism, ableism…the list could go on.
* One more truth: It is ***that*** wilderness—the one where things beyond the control of humanity provide power and privilege—that Jesus actually comes to tame.
  + Followers of Jesus are called to prepare the way for that taming!
  + “Make [Jesus’] paths straight,” John tells us.
    - What does that mean? How do we, a sinful and broken humanity, prepare the way for the sinless one?
* Let’s start with making straight the path.
  + Christians make the path straight when we model grace and love for others.
    - A single e-mail about the preschool’s need for tissues brought dozens of boxes within a week.
    - Every angel on the angel tree will receive gifts from members of LCOS.
    - Our food pantry functions with a healthy budget and plenty of food for those in need.
* We fall short as often as not, though.
  + How often do you, like me, leave the grocery store having neglected to purchase even one item for the food pantry?
  + How often you, like me, wave at the driver who cut you off in traffic neglecting to use all of the fingers on your waving hand?
  + How often do you, like me, get short-tempered with those you love because you are stressed?
* “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.”
  + The verbs here? Those are what Biblical scholars call Divine Passives.
    - They tell what God is doing—or going to do—in the world.
  + That’s the Gospel, right there. When we get it right—and when we fall short—the promise is that ***all flesh shall see the salvation of God.***

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warren\_County,\_Pennsylvania [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warren\_County,\_Pennsylvania [↑](#endnote-ref-2)