

Advent 2-December 5, 2021

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Luke 3:1-6

“God’s Infrastructure Plan”

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

In the first year when John F. Kennedy was president, when Archie Gubbrud was governor of the state of South Dakota, and when V. L. Cruiusenberry was mayor of Sioux Falls and when Fredrik Axel Shiotz was bishop of the Lutheran Church in America and Saint John XXIII was pope of the Roman Catholic church, it was also the year that I was born. Big deal, right! It would have of course been simpler just to say I was born in 1961. Some people don’t care about all the details I added, but for some people these details seem to help validate the reality of an event.

Adding a few more details than probably were necessary is what you often find from the writings of Luke which we will be where most of the gospel readings will be from this new church year. Luke’s main point in this section of scripture is simply to announce that John the Baptist has started to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. But instead of just saying that, Luke begins with the details of who the authorities are politically and in the church. Luke pinpoints the arrival of John the Baptist by saying it was in the 15th year in the reign of Emperor Tiberius. You might be more familiar with the person he names next, the person that we mention each week in the Apostles’ Creed, Pontius Pilate who we say Jesus suffered under. Then Luke mentions three more people, Herod (Antipas), Philip, and Lysanias who were tetrarchs that were given authority over similar sized areas of land. Then after Luke covers the political authorities, he states that the arrival of John the Baptist happened when Annas and Caiaphas were high priests.

The political leaders were listed first since at this time it was the Roman leaders who also ruled the church. They were not particularly concerned about following the Jewish law since Annas and Caiaphas are both named as high priests. Under strict Jewish law there was to be only one high priest, but they had already deposed Annas and had appointed his son-in-law, Caiaphas to take his place, but to keep peace in the countryside they let Annas also keep his title.

Giving all of these details, indeed helps to validate the timing of the arrival of John the Baptist who prepares the way for Jesus. But maybe even more important than the listing of all these high-ranking people to identify the time when John the Baptist arrived, their names are listed to emphasize that it was none of these officials of high esteem were given the message to prepare the way for the savior of the world. The message was given to a back-roads, not dressed for success, honey-dipped grasshopper eating prophet. The message of salvation bypassed the temple of the church and the political leaders and was upstaged in the wilderness and people came from all around the countryside to hear the message John the Baptist came to deliver.

I woke up very early Friday morning and couldn’t get back to sleep and as I was channel surfing, I came across the 2003 movie “Radio”. I hadn’t watched it for many years, so I had already forgotten some of the details of this great movie. For me the story line is so good that I once again found myself getting emotional and wiping what was probably more than just sleep from my eyes. The story is written so well, and each character does such a good job playing their part that it seems real. It wasn’t until the movie

was over and the details are given that TL Hanna High School is a real school who had a real football coach named Harold Jones and there was a real person named James Robert Kennedy who was the main character "Radio".

In the same way, hearing the familiar story of John the Baptist who prepared the way for Jesus is believable to me without all the details that Luke gives to provide evidence that the story is real. Like in the movie, we learn the most from "Radio", the person who has the least education and ranking in the story, just like we learn about Jesus from the lowly preacher who has no building or pulpit to preach from.

John the Baptist the wilderness preacher tells his hearers to prepare the way for Jesus in the way an engineer would present a comprehensive infrastructure rebuilding plan for a county or country so that there is smooth and safe passage as you travel. The goal of God's Infrastructure Plan is to look like our two of the Interstates in South Dakota. The first step is to remove any winding roads and make the pathway straight. In South Dakota, you can travel from east to west or north to south without barely turning your steering wheel. The second part of the plan is to make the road flat by filling in valleys and bringing down the hills. The final step is to remove any rough parts in the road, so the way is smooth as glass.

We have seen many examples recently of how the infrastructure in our area has been improved with these same infrastructure plans. The bridge is now safe coming into Baltic from the west with a safe place for people to walk to the ballpark. The road west of Dell Rapids that used to be very rough, now it is an easy drive going west out of town to the interstate. The road to Crooks a mile west of where we live was repaired recently by filling in the valleys and lowering the high places and then finishing the project with laying down a smooth new asphalt road.

But what does it mean when John the Baptist uses road improvement terms to prepare the way for Jesus? And why did John the Baptist use these road terms when there weren't likely many roads to travel on at this time in history? Did John the Baptist complete the project so that there is nothing left for you and I to do with God's Infrastructure plan? It seems peculiar to use this kind of language to prepare the way for Jesus, but we do know that during this time whenever a king was coming to visit a town, the road was cleared so there was nothing in the way so the king would quickly and safely be delivered to the town he wanted to go.

This is the same thing we are still to do today to prepare for Jesus' arrival. Sometimes it does mean clearing the roads and sidewalks of snow so that you can safely arrive in church. But Jesus' pathway to us is through our ears. We prepare for Jesus by removing any distractions that would prevent God's word from entering our ears. We are to remove any clutter that would send us on a detour away from hearing what Jesus has to say to us. There is no more direct way to hear the story of Jesus than through the mouths of children retelling the Christmas story.

Last night at the first Madrigal performance, there were twelve members of the royal court who provided some of the music. But I noticed that when the twelve youth sang and acted out the "Twelve Days of Christmas" with the "royal court" I couldn't find one person who was listening to the adult singers. Everyone's eyes and ears were focused on the children. The message was not delivered to people by the adults, it was delivered on a path made straight by these young people.

I am looking forward to once again hearing the good news that Jesus is born from our church Christmas programs in a couple weeks as they prepare your ears and your hearts to receive the salvation of your Savior, born in Bethlehem. Amen