

Luke 3:1-6 (Second Sunday in Advent—Series C)

“A Savior from Sin”

Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT

December 5, 2021

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

¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, ⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

Words have meaning. They signify something. Cat. Dog. Boy. Girl. Pizza. Apple.

Contrary to what I believe is the nonsensical game playing out in society and culture where one can simply change the meaning of a word to suit their need or fancy, I believe that words still have meaning. This is all truer and more certain when it comes to words of Holy Scripture. For the record, I believe that the Scriptures—the Books of the Old and New Testament—**are** the divinely inspired and inerrant Word of God. They are θεόπνευστος, God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16, *theopneustos*). As Peter wrote the God-breathed words of 2 Peter 1:21, “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

I believe that Luke, physician and companion of the Apostle Paul, wrote the Holy Spirit inspired words of his Gospel that we read from today. He penned in the prolog, “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely

for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:1–4 ESV). And that certainty lies in the historicity of what Luke has written by the power of the Holy Spirit in his God-breathed Gospel. "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness."

It was to John, the last "Old Testament" prophet, that God's Word came, just as that Word had come to so many of the Lord's prophets before him: Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jonah, Haggai, and Zechariah. God's Word came to John by the power of the Holy Spirit and he went into all the surrounding region of the Jordan River preaching that Word. It was a Word that had meaning using words that had meaning. Words like repentance, the forgiveness of sins.

It is this proclamation and preaching of John that the Evangelist Luke centers in the historical events he mentioned. This Word and Preaching is not a philosophical idea. It happened. "It's actual. It's factual. It's very truth of very truth, historical, not made."¹ And since John is proclaiming "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins," those words tell us that there is sin that needs repenting of and forgiving. I mean, consider that last half

¹ Francis C. Rossow, *Gospel Handles* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2001), 176.

of the Gospel reading where John preached to the crowds, "O brood of vipers!" Isn't that every preacher's dream to enter the pulpit, look out at his flock, and point the finger, "O brood of vipers"? But every preacher does that, just not in those words. Pastors are to call out sin before the hearts and minds of their people because sin is **THE** problem. It is the malady that faces every human being. The law written on the heart, that squirmy feeling inside our conscience when we consider "should I or shouldn't I," convicts us that things are not so right after all. If they were, there wouldn't be that squirmy feeling of debate. I'd always do what was good and right. But we don't.

God's Word says we don't. And I believe the historic, factual, inspired and inerrant Word to be God's Word of truth to me and to you. God's Word of Law shows us our sins. That was one of the principles of Biblical interpretation that we looked at last Wednesday in Bible class. And as one of our scholars, whose name I will keep anonymous so as not to embarrass, pointed out that if we don't know our sins, then we don't have any need for Jesus, a Savior from sin. If God's Word doesn't convince me that I am a sinner who has fallen short of God's glory, who not only does things contrary to God's will as revealed in the Bible, but is by very nature separated from God and an enemy of God, what in the world do I need with repentance and the forgiveness of sins? I don't. Those who are "well have no need of a physician," Jesus said, "but the sick do. I came to call not those who are righteous in their own eyes. I came to call the sinners (Mk. 2:17). I came for the ones who, like the tax collector, beat their chests in sorrow and agony over their sinfulness and lost condition before God and beg, 'Have mercy on me, a sinner.'"

And that's why the Word of God came to John in the wilderness, so that He might proclaim a baptism of repentance for the very real and necessary forgiveness of sins. And the reason that John preached this Word from God is because God promised through the prophet Isaiah that a wilderness voice would cry out in preparation for the Lord Himself to come and to deal with the brokenness of the reality of sin.

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: '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 become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'" "His paths" are the Lord's paths, the paths of our God who is coming, who is the promised Messiah. This Messiah is Lord. This Messiah is God-made-flesh, Jesus, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in Mary who was a virgin.

John was getting the people ready for Jesus, true God and true Man, the Messiah-Savior, who would, in history, come to Jerusalem, enter His holy city, and accomplish salvation. Salvation means to be saved. From what? Real sin and it's real consequence of death! What Jesus came to accomplish for everyone is their salvation from sin and death. And that's the message of the Good News, the Gospel.

Without the Gospel proclaimed to us, we are still trapped in our sins. We are still under the power of death and devil. Without the Gospel, we live in the delusion that we are somehow in and of ourselves okay with God. That simply isn't true. The Bible uses terms like bondage, darkness, slavery to describe just how far we are from the freedom, light, and life that God intends for us. But the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom.1:16). The Gospel is what delivers to you the forgiveness of sins that Jesus purchased for you on the

cross. The forgiveness of sins earned by Christ's blood releases you from the guilt of sin. It rescues you from death and gives you eternal life. Christ's perfect life, death, and resurrection saves you from the bondage to sin and Satan. His Gospel brings you into the freedom of the children of God with the assurance that God does not view you as a brood of vipers.

Through the Gospel, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, you no longer stand under the condemnation and fear of God's Law. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Law is now your guide for living life as the baptized, forgiven, and redeemed people of God in Christ. Even as the crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers asked John, "What should we do?", you and I ask with faith and trust in Christ, "What should we do so that we might thank and praise, serve and obey our merciful Father for all that He has given to us through our Savior?" His answer is given in His Word. Produce fruits in keeping with repentance and faith. Love God and show love and mercy to your neighbor in the name of Jesus, God helping you through the power and grace of His Holy Spirit, as you live the new life given you in the Gospel.

The Word of God came to John in the wilderness. His ministry was to prepare the people for the coming of Emmanuel—God with Us—in the person of Jesus. John preached the Word of Law and Gospel, pointing people to their need for a Savior from sin and ultimately pointing directly at Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

The Word of God came to St. Luke as he wrote down this Gospel by the inspiration of the Spirit so that God's Word might come to us in the pages of Scripture. Luke's Gospel shows us our need also for repentance and the forgiveness of sins. And it shows us Jesus,

the Savior, the Lamb of God, who has taken away our sins through His death and resurrection.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, this Good News Word about Jesus delivers that actual forgiveness to us. It is in this way that the Word of God comes to us in the Holy Scriptures—the inspired and inerrant Word of God in Law and Gospel. That Word comes to us as we read and meditate and study and hear it preached. And that Word gives us Jesus. That Gospel Word brings us to repentance of our sins with faith in Jesus our Savior. And that Word of God in Christ through the work of His Spirit bestows on us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Amen.