

**9 December 2018      Advent 2—Changing Our Minds—Luke 3:1-6**

Lots of people around this city are looking for change. These last four years since the energy slump have worn down many affected by it. A stubbornly high unemployment rate—the highest of any major Canadian city—along with stalled progress on pipelines, and a crushing oil price freeze are making hope difficult this Christmas for some Calgarians. Distress counselling and food bank use remain in high demand. Politicians are accused of ineffectiveness. Where is the change that we need going to come from?

Our Gospel lesson opens today with a veritable “who’s who” of the ancient world—Roman Emperor Tiberius, Governor Pontus Pilate, rulers Herod and Philip, high priests Annas and Caiaphas. And then in the midst of all these heavy-lifters we hear that the Word of God came to John in the wilderness.

Now that’s a change. Wouldn’t you expect that the Word of God would come to the movers and shakers of the time, with all of their influence and power? Who is John? And what is he doing out in the desolate, lonely wilderness? No grand palace there. Just this isolated oddball, out in the desert—the place everyone wants to avoid—telling us that change is indeed coming. That the old world is fading away. So prepare for change—for the coming of the Lord.

And John’s word from God says that the most necessary change begins within each one of us. Make a road in yourself so that the arrival of Christ may be made possible—that’s the most necessary change. Knock down the mountains and bring up the valleys so Christ can make his way into your

life—a picture that people living in the shadow of the Rockies can appreciate. There had to be some heavy-lifting for there to be a way through those Rockies.

John is saying that to clear a path for the coming of the Lord you need to knock down some mountains and fill in some valleys—in other words some major change—what Christians call repentance. The Greek word for repentance means literally to change one's mind: a complete turn around of thought and action. And when we change our minds and thinking, we open the way for changed living. The first two questions of baptism relate to this change of mind—turning from sin and evil, and powers in the world which defy God's goodness and love; and turning to Jesus Christ who becomes our way, our road.

As John reminds us, if we are preparing for the coming of Christ into our lives—into the church—we need to knock down some mountains and fill in some valleys. Are there some things in us that are too much? And are there other things that are too small, underdeveloped? Are there some parts in your life that are exaggerated and have taken on too great an importance? What's the role of work or money in your life? What's the role of success? What is the role of pleasure—food, drink, sex? What is the role of the esteem of others? Think about the things in your life that have become way too important—and that need to be knocked down? Or is fear, hardness of heart, isolation, loss of vision, despair creating mountains in our community that are blocking the Lord's access?

To create a mountain means that you also create a valley. If you exaggerate one thing—another will be under stressed. So what is being

ignored in your life? What are your mountains preventing you from having time and resources to do? What relationships are underdeveloped? What is under stressed in your life spiritually? What role is prayer playing in your life? Are we adequately expressing mercy and justice through our giving of talent and resources to “the least of these”—the hungry, the thirsty, the sick and suffering, the imprisoned, the stranger? If these are valleys, how could they be filled in?

Truly, the coming of the Lord is sheer grace—we can’t prompt it, but we can aid it by making the highway straight; by placing what is exaggerated in it’s proper place: and by allowing underdeveloped places to be grown in us. Repentance is about more than just saying I’m sorry—repentance brings with it the promise of a new community. Not stainless steel Christians who never bend or break, but a community of repentant sinners who know that the work of transformation is never finished. This community of faith exists as a place where we can confess openly what needs to change in our lives and turn from whatever form that destructiveness may take. A place where we find in each other a community that bears one another’s burdens and will support us in that turning that brings the arrival of the Lord and his life in our midst.

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