

Luke 3:1-6

2nd Sunday in Advent

December 8, 1991

We're heading for the wilderness today. We are going out to see John. John, the Baptizer. In the wilderness.

What will you leave behind? Your job. You will have no answer to the question, what do you do, out there, in the wilderness. Leave behind who you are as a supervisor, <sup>or</sup> a teacher, a receptionist, a manager, <sup>a student, a parent</sup> For out in the wilderness, where John is there are no jobs, no one who works on the assembly line, or who checks the books, or who visits the sick.

Leave behind your clothing. The latest styles for work and play have no place out there, with John. Coats and ties, jogging suits and blue jeans, skirts and dresses and everything that makes you fit in, and brings words of admiration, looks of envy, leave them behind.

Leave behind your cars and houses, where some of us flee to hide, to escape from everything. Leave behind every feeling that says, "I'm somebody as you admire what is yours and yours alone, what is shiny and new or arranged or made by you. Leave behind neat lawns and large yards and polished chrome.

Leave behind your families. Go out to see John alone. Out in the wilderness, <sup>a</sup> parents status means nothing, children's accomplishments have no place out there. What husband or wife has accomplished cannot be carried out there, to John. Just take yourself, you and you alone with nothing else to the wilderness, to where John is.

Are you willing to come with me? Can you imagine yourself with nothing but you out in the wilderness before the prophet of God? Uncovered, unprotected, just as you are?

How does it feel? <sup>I think I will</sup> Like death? Emptiness? Who am I now without job, without home and bank accounts, and without accomplishments or family? Who am I without anything to point to that says, I am worthy. <sup>How anybody sees I have this?</sup> What is left then?

~~There is~~ <sup>Hear</sup> John's voice, crying out 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 be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Out ~~there~~ <sup>are</sup> in the wilderness, stripped of every status and shame, there ~~would be~~ no more mountain people, looking down from on high on lesser mortals, no more valley people, lower than dirt, repeatedly flooded by life's misfortune. No more crooked people twisted by sin and by hardship. But all flesh, together, on level ground, waiting and expectant to see the salvation which God has prepared.

And as we gathered ~~out there~~ <sup>there</sup> in the wilderness, with nothing but ourselves and each other, waiting, watching, He ~~would come~~ <sup>could</sup>. The one whose way John was preparing ~~would come~~ <sup>could</sup> to us. His name is Jesus. And as we look at him, ourselves empty, naked, dead, he takes hold of your hand, and looks deep into your soul and pronounces his verdict. Child of God. Child of God. For all time and all eternity, this is how He shall know you. Child of God. One by one all flesh together shall see the salvation of God, and his name is Jesus. And his word is love.

Most of us made that journey to the wilderness a long time ago. Before we had houses and cars and jobs and names for the loving faces that smiled upon us. When we were baptized <sup>he</sup> who gave his life and was raised to life for you, Jesus saw you as you are and said, you are worthy for eternity.

A gift. Grace we call it. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God wants you to believe that gift, that grace, that word of Jesus to you more than you believe anything that happens. When shame hollows you out, and sins accuse and point their fingers, and fears suffocate hear that word once more, Child of God. When successes puff up your chest, and wealth

glitters and dazzles, and power whispers, now you're really somebody, seek that level ground once more where your Lord stands and <sup>manger</sup> ~~says~~, Child of God.

It won't be long until the world will see where that word leads. The wise men of this world, and rough and hardened shepherds, a young girl, a peasant, and her betrothed, an honest upright man, and you and I and angels will all fall to our knees to worship Him. We will all meet on level ground <sup>there</sup> ~~there~~ before his manger bed, and find our common humanity there. In Jesus presence we will find that we are each sister and brothers. His one word, child of God, will unite us in one family. And though we return to houses and families and jobs we will know that the differences only mask the truth. We are one in Christ. <sup>who is himself, child of God</sup>

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.