

*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, 2during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3He 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 the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out 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 be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; 6and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"*

In the sixth year of the presidency of George Bush, when Robert Taft was governor of the state of Ohio and Rob Berner the mayor of Avon Lake, when Lee Miller was interim bishop of the Northeast Ohio Synod and Lynn Schlessman was pastor of Christ Lutheran Church the Word of God came to whom? Who would you choose for that space? James Baker, Rush Limbaugh, Daniel Shore, Dick Feagler? Who is God sending with God's word? Someone important – wise – influential? When God sent the prophets God sent the prophets to speak to the kings to tell them what they should do and what they should not. Who would God want spoken to today? The president? The United Nations? Bishop Hanson who presides over the ELCA? When we pray Sunday after Sunday we ask God to guide our president and the leaders of the nations. Surely God is focused on what they are doing for their actions affect so many.

Yet when the Word of God came in about the year 30 AD that word came to a nobody – he had no title or authority or position. He did not have the ears of kings and rulers nor the ear of religious leaders. His name was John - John the son of Zechariah, son of a minor priest.

John was sent to the area around the Jordan River to proclaim a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John was not sent to all the important people whose names introduce this section of the gospel according to Luke. God's spokesperson was not sent to Tiberias Caesar, the most powerful man on earth – not to Pontius Pilate nor to Herod nor Phillip nor Lysanias, nor to the priests Anna and Caiaphas. John was sent to preach to common people. Every day people, the ones the history books never mention. He was not sent to right wrongs and feed the

hungry nor to heal the sick but to proclaim a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The way for God would be prepared in the hearts and lives of little people calling them to turn and be forgiven.

Forgiven. What a weak thing it is to forgive. A powerless thing it is to forgive. How can the world be changed if the evil ones are not punished and the good ones rewarded? What kind of control is there in letting go of all offenses and treating people as if they had done no wrong? Yet when the Word of God came to John he was sent on a mission of calling people to a washing of repentance for the forgiveness of their sins.

For John was a voice 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 be made straight, and the rough way made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”*

Today, will the way of the Lord still be prepared through a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins?

So much begins with repentance. Recognizing that the way I have been going is not working – not for good - being open to a whole new way.

What is not working in your life? What relationships? What ways of thinking? What ways of doing? To repent is to let go of the way I have been doing things all along and doing in a new way.

How often the way of God is opened by a crisis - a death in the family, a broken relationship, a loss of a job, the public awareness of a sin. In those moments we realize that just going down the same road will not work – a new road and a new way is needed. John is not waiting for such a crisis but is calling you and I this day to a new awareness, a turning away from all that is not bringing love and faith and hope into your heart. Letting go of old ways that are not God’s ways and trusting that God will not hold those old ways against you – that God will forgive.

I began asking who is the one to whom God’s word comes today. You are that one. You are the one sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus. No, you are not armed with a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins but you can tell of Jesus. For as God did with John so today God is speaking in the most unlikely places through the most

unlikely people. Even as nations rage and totter God is at work to bring reconciliation and new beginnings in your life and in the lives you touch. God is at work to fill up lives with faith and hope and love.

God is at work in you.