

“Are We There Yet?”

**Hear the words from the disciple Luke:**

Read Luke 3:1-6

“The Word of God for the people of God.”

**“Thanks be to God”**

**Let us pray:**

Lord, by Your grace may I be given Your words, Your message to proclaim without fear.

As I prepare to speak Your message, intercede my words by Your Holy Spirit and give them life. May You be my vocabulary and speech so that all who hear it do not hear me, but instead, hear You. Use these words I speak as an instrument, O Lord, to help others see truth in Your Son.

In Jesus Christ’s name, who came to make your message perfectly clear – and perfect.

Amen.

In preparing for the sermon today, I’m reminded of cleaning. In getting prepared for company to come over.

A story about **Kendall and her dad:**

waking them up w/ **vacuum** hitting door

(Annoying)

A story about **SMI’s at The Citadel** and roommate **Kenny** (Core Squad football player) always AWOL.

Which meant I had twice the amount of work to do

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and sometimes that work would be all for nothing because some **upperclassmen** would come in and do **raid parties** where they just trash your room.

I remember feeling many times tired and defeated, asking the question why am I doing this? Who am I getting ready for? Is this over yet? What’s the point of cleaning when its just going to get trashed again?

In our Bible lesson today, we read about a man named John who went into the wilderness around the Jordan River preaching and telling people to **prepare** for the coming of the Lord.

When John told people to prepare for the coming of the Lord, he didn't mean that they should go home and sweep the floor, pick up their mess, and make their beds. He meant that they should prepare their **hearts**. How? By **repenting** of their sins and **turning** toward God. When they did this, John would baptize them in the Jordan River. That is how he got the name, "John the Baptist."

The Bible tells us that Jesus is **coming** again and, just as in the day of John the Baptist, it is important for us to make sure our **hearts** are clean and ready for the coming of the Lord. We do that by confessing our sins and asking God to forgive us. If we will do that, the Bible tells us that he will forgive us and make our hearts clean.

But in the **wilderness**? In the wilderness, there’s no safety net. No Plan B. No savings account or National Guard. In the wilderness, life is raw and risky, and our illusions of self-sufficiency fall apart fast. To locate ourselves at the outskirts of power is to confess our vulnerability in the starkest terms. In the wilderness, we have no choice but to wait and watch as if our lives depend on God showing up. Because they do. And

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it’s into such an environment — an environment so far removed from power as to make power laughable — that **the word of God comes**.

But Luke goes on. Not only is the wilderness a place that **exposes our need for God**. It’s a place that **calls us to repentance**. “John went into all the region around the Jordan,” Luke tells us, “proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Elsewhere in the Gospels, we read that crowds streamed into the wilderness to heed John’s call. In other words, they left the lives they knew best, and ventured into the unknown to save their hearts through repentance. Something about the wilderness brought people to their knees.

For us 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians, though, “sin” and “repentance” are loaded words we try to avoid. Many of us, particularly those of us who grew up in fundamentalist circles, actively dislike the word “sin.” We associate it with paralyzing guilt and eternal hellfire. With fear and self-loathing rather than grace and mercy.<sup>1</sup>

And yet, Advent begins with an honest, wilderness-style reckoning with sin. We can’t get to the manger unless we go through John, and John is all about repentance. Is it possible that this might become an occasion for relief? Maybe, if we can get past our baggage and follow John out into the wilderness, we will find comfort in the fact that something more profound and deep is at stake in our souls than “I make mistakes sometimes,” or “I have a few issues.”<sup>2</sup>

What is sin? Growing up, I was taught that sin is “breaking God’s laws.” Or “missing the mark,” as an archer misses his target. Or “committing immoral acts.” These definitions aren’t wrong, but they assume that sin is a problem primarily because it angers

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.journeywithjesus.net>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

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God. But God's temper is not what's at stake; he's more than capable of managing his own emotions. Sin is a problem because it kills. It kills us. Why? Because sin is a refusal to become fully human. It's anything that interferes with the opening up of our whole hearts to God, to others, to creation, and to ourselves. Sin is estrangement, disconnection, sterility, disharmony. It's the slow accumulation of dust, choking the soul. It's the sludge that slows us down, that says, "Quit. Stop trying. Give up. Change is impossible."<sup>3</sup>

Sin is apathy. Care-less-ness. A frightened resistance to an engaged life. Sin is the opposite of creativity, the opposite of abundance, the opposite of flourishing. It is a walking death. And it is easier to spot, name, and confess a walking death in the wilderness than it is anywhere else.

Finally, Luke suggests that the wilderness is a place where we can see the landscape whole, and participate in God's great work of leveling inequality and oppression. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, Luke predicts a day when “every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth.”<sup>4</sup>

Where are you located during this Advent season? Where is God in your life, and what will it take for you to participate in that uncomfortable but essential work this Advent season?

**I ask you are we there yet?**

**Are we truly ready for the coming of the Lord?**

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

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December 9, 2018

**Let us pray:**