

**"The Wilderness Journey"**  
**Luke 3:1-6**

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Emmett, Idaho

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Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Lord God - in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

On the eighth day the old priest, the sinful man who had been muted by the angel Gabriel, motioned for a writing tablet and wrote the name of his son, "His name is John" (Luke 2:63). Thus and then, this priest, "of the division of Abijah" (Luke 1:5) "was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying" (1:67) ...

"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest;  
for you will go before the face of the LORD to prepare His ways,  
to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins,  
through the tender mercy of our God,  
with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;  
to give Light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the Way of peace" (1:76-79).

So John, the only begotten son of old Zachariah and well-seasoned Elizabeth, "grew and became strong in spirit" (1:80). "John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey" (Mark 1:6). And so it came to pass that this John, kinsman of Jesus, "was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel" (Luke 1:80). This prophet of the Most High, a man "filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb," (1:15) is the forerunner promised by God through the mouths of the prophets, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the Way of the LORD'" (Matthew 3:3).

Please listen to the Gospel reading once again as you consider ...

... The Wilderness Journey

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being high priests, the Word of God came to John the son of Zachariah in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying:

"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 brought low;  
And the crooked places shall be made straight  
And the rough ways made smooth;  
And all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

The Wilderness Journey starts in a certain Egypt and for each of us it is a beginning headed for destruction. The reason is that every infant conceived by the flesh of a man and a woman is a conception into bondage and unto slavery — bound by Sin and enslaved by Satan. Some children of wrath never leave this land of awful oppression and never shed the yoke of devilish captivity. The Blood of the Passover Lamb never covers the houses of some and these who are dead will die again when the Angel of Death comes silently and unannounced. Thank God that He has not left you like this.

You, like many others, are covered by "the sprinkled Blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12:24) and you are baptized, being led through the Red Sea and delivered from the crab-like clutches of the old evil Pharaoh who had been exorcized from heaven. In Holy Baptism you are washed of your sins by the Blood of Christ. He has delivered you "from the power of darkness and ... into the Kingdom of His Beloved Son, in Whom" you "have redemption through His Blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14). Through Baptism you are graciously delivered from the land of death because God washes you with the Blood of Christ when He sprinkles you with the water of Holy Baptism. In this gracious washing by the hand of God, you are brought out of Egypt and you are declared a citizen of Heaven and an heir of Paradise.

In the Hebrew Midrash, specifically a work titled "Pesachim," the ancient scribe records the following commentary concerning Exodus 13:8 — "In every generation a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt, for it is written, 'And thou shall tell thy son in that day saying, "It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt."' Therefore are we bound to give thanks, to praise, to glorify, to honour, to exalt, to extol, and to bless Him Who wrought all these wonders for our fathers and for us" (10:5).

Therefore, dear baptized, you are between two lands ... out of Egypt and not yet in the Promised Land. You are in the wilderness and on your individual wilderness journey. As you continue your pilgrimage, the LORD provides all that you need for your days and years in the wilderness ... water from the Rock that wells up to eternal life and quenches the thirst of your soul ... the Manna, "the bread of God Who comes down from heaven" (John 6:33) Who sustains the faithful soul.

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being high priests, the Word of God came to John the son of Zachariah in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the words of Isaiah the

prophet, saying:

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:  
'Prepare the Way of the LORD.'"

Make ready the Way of the LORD. To those who came out to hear John, they heard him proclaim, "prepare the Way of the LORD." But this Way is not a physical highway that avoids certain hindrances and levels earthly obstacles. It is a spiritual preparation that enables God to come to His people in order to deliver them. Thus, the obstacles that are in the way of the Way of the LORD are in the heart of each person. The sinful heart of the individual brings forth all manner of vileness that, if left as is, would decimate the soul, "for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander" (Matthew 15:19). This is especially true for the people of God. The Way of the LORD must be cleared and this is all His doing. To make ready the Way of the LORD through these wretched hearts of ours is a task that is completely beyond the capability of any one of us. Only God can do this and prepare the Way for Himself.

The people of God complain in the wilderness - too often loathing the Manna from above and amazingly desiring to return to the flesh-pots of Egypt where they would die under the yoke of sin's bondage. But that is the way of man that results in everlasting death and is not the Way of the LORD that leads to Eternal Life. The heart is prepared when the LORD works deep sorrow for Sin and sins, and when He enables you to confess that you are a poor, miserable, wretched, condemned sinner who pleads forgiveness, not on the basis of your works and deeds, or words and thoughts, but on account of Jesus, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The voice in the wilderness cries, "Repent! Prepare the Way of the LORD!" This is John's invitation to receive the God-given gifts of repentance, and to hear the Word of God's Law and Gospel, and to be baptized for the remission of sins. "This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes" (Psalm 118:23).

Now in the eighth year of the reign of President Clinton, Jessie Ventura being governor of Minnesota, Dubyah being presidential-candidate of the United States, his brother Jeb governor of Florida and the region of Tallahassee, and Grady Barr mayor of Abilene, Cardinal Ratzinger being prefect, the Word of God came to Michael the son of Leonard in the wilderness. And he continued in the Emmett area around the Payette, preaching Law and Gospel for the remission of sins, as it is written in the Word, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the Way of the LORD, Make His paths straight.' "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" (John 3:2).

And the hearts of the people in that congregation were no different than the hearts of both the penitent and the Pharisee, both the sorrowing and the Sadducee, who came out to hear Elijah the prophet. There are some within the congregation of Our Redeemer who despise preaching and the Word of God - who are returning to Egypt - who loath the liturgy - who grind their teeth because of their hatred for the LORD's Way - who complain about the Daily Bread served on Sunday.

Thus, dear people of God, this is the invitation to each of you to repent in order that ...

"Every valley shall be filled  
And every mountain and hill brought low;  
And the crooked places shall be made straight  
And the rough ways made smooth;

And all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

This is the invitation to stand before the LORD your God and say:

"O Almighty God merciful Father, I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto Thee all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended Thee and justly deserved Thy temporal and eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorrow for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray Thee of Thy boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor, sinful being."

Then it is the blessed duty of the voice crying in the wilderness - it is the wonderful task for the man standing in the prophetic succession of Zachariah's son - it is the joyful work of the overseer of souls, to announce the forgiveness of sins and to baptize for the remission of the same - to point to the place where God's gracious presence is among His people and say, "Behold, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world" (Luke 1:29).

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' spring up and cause trouble, and by it the many become defiled; that no one be immoral or irreligious like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears" (Hebrews 12:12-17).

In your wilderness journey, may God grant that you remain "faithful unto death" and be given "the Crown of Life" (Revelation 2:10) - that you may be given the faith to confess that "Jesus is Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:3) - and that you may acknowledge that you are "strangers and exiles on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13), for people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland ... they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city" (Hebrews 11).

"Therefore are we bound to give thanks, to praise, to glorify, to honour, to exalt, to extol, and to bless Him Who wrought all these wonders for our fathers and for us." Amen.