

**Luke 3:1-6** - *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, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as 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.*

*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.'"*

I learn so much from our parishioners. From you. You are theologians. We teach each other – with our stories, our insights, our experiences in life, our questions about God. You are theologians.

This week, after a particularly tough experience, one of our parishioners texted me and said, “In a gigantic waiting room of uncertainty and trying not to lose it for more than a polite amount of time, (she wrote) . . . today I decided that God looked like that little hole at the top of the bathroom sink. You know the tiny little drain to help in case of an overflow. That little hole should probably get more attention!”

“Wow! That’s brilliant” I wrote back. “Did you know that the gospel this week is about God making the high places low and the low places high and the crooked places straight so that we can find our way?” Do you mind if I share that in my sermon?”

Sure, she said. God is like the tiny little drain to help in case of an overflow. When the water – metaphorically speaking – is up to our necks, and still rising. When the waters are treacherous. When we can’t get our footing on dry land, when we can’t see our way home.

And then we do. Because the rising water recedes, one drop at a time.

You are theologians. I learn so much from you. We learn from each other –

Another parishioner this week told me about going down into the basement of his then new house – and the water was coming up so fast – out of a shower stall that had been installed incorrectly by a previous owner. He ripped out what he could of the shower stall, then went immediately to Home Depot to rent a jack hammer, came home, and started drilling into the floor to break up the concrete. His wife, hearing the noise, feeling the house shake, looking at the rubble in their new home, shouted out him, “Do you even know what you are doing?” “No” he called back, “But I do know that I’ve got to get to the drain and cap it off.”

He told me that story to show me, to teach me, that sometimes you have to rip out something– to do it over again – even if you don’t really know how to go about it – but trusting that it will be made right again. Carved out again, and reset. One square inch at a time.

And so I wonder now if this is a way to think about Advent this year- our Advent journey.

The prophet calls out in the wilderness – from the dangerous terrain, – “Make the mountains level and the fill in the valleys and make the crooked treacherous paths straight so that we can find our way”

Our way home. Our way to safety. For those, who have been mistreated, oppressed, to find the way to justice. For some who have been deeply hurt, or for some who have done the hurting, to find the way to forgiveness, to wholeness. To find our way back to joy! To see, as the prophet says, the salvation of God – the saving, restoring, healing – of God.

John – the prophet– who baptized people in the river Jordan out in the wilderness (and wilderness can be treacherous, sometimes dangerous, arid places) - tells us today that the way will be made smooth by our repentance. By Working it out. The path is cleared – reset - by our being reconciled to God and to one another. And that is done with intention, when we seek to amend, to mend, and to start all over again, with hope.

You know – these words that John the Baptist says in the wilderness:

Every valley shall be filled,  
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,

