

Second Sunday of Advent, Cycle C December 6, 2009

Readings: Baruch 5:1-9; Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11; Luke 3:1-6

Smooth and Level Paths

I live on the end of a dead-end gravel road. I use the word *gravel* loosely because the composition of the road is more clay than gravel. The road commission comes out and grades it periodically. They temporarily make it look smooth and pretty, but they don't seem to have the resources to address the underlying drainage issues. With the next rain the water channels down my side of the road and wants to end up running down my driveway or onto my front lawn. I have to be vigilant; I need to go out with my shovel and rake every time the road is graded and reestablish a barrier.

Last Wednesday I heard noise out by the road and, when I investigated, I found a private contractor was working with a bobcat to re-grade the end of the road so it would no longer wash out the foot path at the end. He was actually using a transit to check the slope and was moving dirt from the far side of the road to my side of the road so that the rain water would drain into the opposite ditch which was by an empty field. It sounded promising, but the clay/gravel mix he was moving was sloppy and wet from the standing water at the end of the road. His parting words to me were: "Hopefully, this will get a chance to dry out and pack down before the next rain." Fifteen minutes after he left, it started to rain. The garbage truck came the next morning and, of course, had to turn around in the freshly graded muck. And now I have ruts that are that are a foot deep.

I was thinking about my ongoing struggle with the road as I went in to work on my homily for this week. And I reflected on this morning's words from Baruch and from Isaiah—words about filling in valleys and making the roads level and smooth. Isaiah and Baruch prophesied in the Old Testament about a time when the Israelites would return from their exile, but that they would have to choose straight and level paths. They would have to turn once again to follow God's ways and not their own.

And in our gospel passage, John the Baptist is the voice crying in the desert calling people to repentance so that they will be able to recognize the Messiah; so that they would see their salvation. In this season of Advent, we also listen to the Baptist's cry so that we will be prepared to see Jesus when He comes again.

Unlike the road commission who come out every few months for some cosmetic improvements, we must work each day to keep our path truly level and smooth. We must be vigilant and address the underlying problems in our lives. We need to follow the straight path to Jesus. Our journey is a continuous one. St. Paul tells the Philippians, and he tells us: "***I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.***" As Christians, we have a good work started in us through the Holy Spirit, but we need to continue to complete it until our last day on earth. We need to continuously grow in holiness. We need to continuously look for and correct the bumps and turns in our lives, those parts of our character that don't follow God's way; that don't follow Jesus who is the Way.

We are on a journey but we must not get so enamored by the pleasures of the journey that we forget our destination. When we travel on vacation, we are willing to suffer

through some discomforts during our car ride because of our anticipation of our destination. We need to do the same in life. If we want to see Jesus at the end of our journey, we must make the right choices along the way, even if they are not the most enjoyable and pleasant ones.

We can ask ourselves if we are ready to see Jesus. Look deep inside. Are we ready to celebrate His birthday? We're working on that; it's the fun part. But are we ready to face Him as the just Judge and ask for His forgiveness and mercy? Or do we need to take what time we have before we see Him to clean up a little; to be pure and blameless; to put on our Sunday best. Let's use this Advent season productively and establish new patterns for our life that will carry on beyond Christmas and into the new year.

Our second reading this morning concluded with a prayer from St. Paul. It is a prayer and a challenge with the day of Christ in mind—the day when we will face Christ as our Judge. Paul calls us to discern what is truly of value and to grow in love. I would like to close by praying Paul's prayer one more time for you to reflect upon. St. Paul wrote: ***“And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.”***

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