

## Daily Devotional, December 7, 2021 Called (Loudly) to Repentance

***He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all people will see God's salvation."*** Luke 3:3-6 (NIV)

When I was in my late teens and continuing on into my 40's there was one of those old-time street preachers who was trying to browbeat the residents of Worth, IL with the old style of "turn-or-burn" and "the-end-is-near" prophecy that would come blurring loudly out of his megaphone which he also had connected to loudspeakers atop his old Ford station wagon. As a lifelong Christian, I was often convinced that I could sway him with compelling arguments to stop haranguing people who simply desired to go about their shopping. But I was much too sheepish to approach that street preacher, fearing that he would out argue me and send me off with threats of eternal damnation for attempting to prevent "God's work".

I've always thought that if John the Baptist lived today, he would have been viewed the way many of us view street preachers (except for the smell of camel hide and locusts). John knew the words of scripture and used them to point people toward conversion and repentance. Both John the Baptist and that street preacher in Worth felt called by God to this form of ministry. John, who knew he was the fulfillment of prophecy as the one who should prepare the way for the Lord, also knew throughout his ministry that he existed solely for an audience of one: God. The words of Isaiah that he spoke to the people who came to see and hear him are quite familiar to us, though usually only in the context of John's usage.

When Isaiah proclaimed these words, he sought to comfort the exiles of Jerusalem while they were in Babylon, saying that a day would come when God would guide them out of captivity and return them to their homeland. Yet, as is always the case with prophecy, there is more than one level of meaning to the words. The same words that offered comfort to the exiles also called their descendants to know that God still is at work, seeking to lead them to a new and different understanding of salvation. It was an understanding of the spirit and soul rather than one of national security.

The great beauty to me is that these very same words seek to point our hearts and minds to that day when "all people will see God's salvation," on the final day when God's Kingdom will arrive. Thy Kingdom come!

***God of all times and places, we thank you that the words you have spoken through the prophets are just as real and living today as on the day when they were first spoken. Open our hearts and minds to the reality of your ever-moving presence in our lives and in your creation. In Jesus' name, Amen.***