

Second Sunday in Advent/December 9, 2018  
Luke 3:1-14/Your Fortune  
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church  
Deacon Jerry Stobaugh

“Prepare the way of the Lord...”

Human beings are fascinated by the future. Have you ever noticed how much fortune telling goes on today? Palm reading used to be something gypsies did when they traveled the countryside, but now we see signs on shops in every city. Of course now days we have web sites which try and predict just about everything. The economy, will it go up or go down in the year ahead. Sports writers try to predict which team will win this week. Fortune telling is big business today because we all want to know the future.

Today in the Word of God a life-changing prediction of the future appears. God is revealing something is going to happen that will affect us more than any other factor in this life. Something big is coming, the biggest thing this world has ever known. God wants us to prepare ourselves for it to come to us. It cannot be stopped. Its arrival cannot be accurately predicted. But it is coming, and we do well to prepare.

Isaiah first predicted it in the seventh century B.C. He said a person would come calling out in the desert places, “Prepare the way for the Lord.” 700 years later, another person came, saying the same thing. His name was John. His work was baptizing. John reminded people what Isaiah foretold and pointed them to something greater. “One is coming who is greater than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. Prepare yourself for him to come to you.”

The fact Isaiah predicted John’s ministry 700 years before it came is astounding in itself. We cannot comprehend the full impact of this.

In comparison, George Washington, our first president, could not have known 200 plus years ago the United States would one day be made up of 50 states and territories, encompassing 329 million people, and a world power in the twentieth century.

Martin Luther, who lived 500 years ago, could not have known about the new world where we live, or that churches bearing the name Lutheran would flourish here, stronger today than those in his native land of Germany.

Many men speak with insight and forethought, but the keenest minds cannot penetrate the mists that hide the possibilities and events of future ages. We can't even take the curtain off tomorrow and know whether stocks will rise or fall, or whether we will live or die. Yet Isaiah boldly foretold future events. He definitely assures people the Lord, the messiah of God's covenant, would suddenly come to save his people. He would not come alone, but he would have a forerunner, a messenger, to prepare the way for him.

There are many preachers today, in churches, on television, on radio, but there is one preacher who is the greatest. Everyone listens to this preacher. Though people avoid churches and despise the preachers of the Word of the Lord, they all listen to one preacher, the one called death.

His church is the earth. His pulpit is the deathbed, the casket and the grave. With a voice that tears open the heart when he preaches: "O man, it is your time to die. You cannot stay here any longer. This earth is not your home. This life is not the end of your journey. At a time you do not suspect, you will have to leave this earth with all its treasures." This is the sermon death preaches and everyone listens.

To warn us of Christ's coming, John preached a message of repentance. Prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight paths for him. Straighten out the way for him to come into your life, or you will be swept away. Who listens to John's sermon today?

We have many straight roads in this country. You can travel the great highways of the United States. You can drive from coast to coast. What a great interstate system we have. But do you realize what it took to build it? Decades of work, blasting to cut mountain passes from solid rock, great mountains of soil moved to fill in the valleys, bridges built to span rivers, and concrete, millions and millions of yards of concrete were poured. All of this makes a smooth ribbon on which we can travel nonstop from city to city across this land.

God would have us build a highway to our heart so the savior can come in. There are many formidable obstacles in the way. There is the mountain of our pride which must be leveled. We do not see the immensity of our sin. We are too proud to receive a King or allow us to bow our heads in his presence. We love the world and the things in it more than we need a savior. Otherwise, we would let go of these things before it is too late and death forces them out of our hand. The word of God will level this mountain. One look at our sin will flatten our mountain of pride.

There are valleys also. When we are weak and lack strength to follow God, we see how deep the valley is; but Jesus comes to fill in this valley with his goodness. Our weakness is filled with his strength. Where we are unable, he is mighty. The humble and poor are lifted up, restored. His righteousness replaces our unrighteousness. The valleys are filled in. The road to God becomes level.

Our roads are crooked. People today are taking the twisted, crooked way. Depravity and indecency is now acceptable. Sexual sin is

entertainment. Violence is interesting. Children learn these things instead of the straight road of right character, honesty, purity, and justice. The road leads anywhere, everywhere, except to God.

This will not stand. The prophet calls us to make our paths straight for the Lord to come to us. We are to get rid of all filth and moral corruption. The Lord came to cleanse us. He washes away our sin in Holy Baptism. He gives us a new life to live. He shows us the right way we are to live, joyfully casting away the works of darkness and following the ways of light.

The Lord, the king is coming. He came to us in his birth and incarnation. He taught us the true identity of God, a heavenly Father who loves and cares for us. He died for our sins, taking the punishment we deserved upon himself, and freeing us from the coming destruction of every part of this broken world. Behold, the king comes to us, calling us to prepare the way for his return.

This is the fortune telling God wants us to pay attention to, the coming of His Son, your King, the Lord Jesus Christ. He promises you that all mankind will see God's salvation when it comes. For that you must prepare.

The future has been told. How will knowing the future change your life today? Will you straighten the path for him to come? Will you break down the mountain of pride in yourself apart from God? Will you allow Jesus to fill in your valley of sin with his sacrifice for you? Will you continue to follow your own crooked path, or embrace the straight road the Lord has made to your heart?

This is the fortune telling we should pay attention to. Prepare the way for the Lord to come to you. Soli Christos! Christ alone!