

Advent 3 - Year B

BAS: Collect page 270

Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11

Psalms 126 OR Canticle 18

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

St. John 1:6-8, 19-28

St. Mark's, Halifax, December 14, 2014 - 8:00am

"Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. The uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain" (Isa. 40:3). We heard these words last Sunday (Advent 2) and here is the promise of God's love coming to the help of His people in their world of confusion, and also a call to men and women to participate, under God's leadership, in bringing peace and justice to a bewildered world

Yesterday, I went to Milford, near Shubenacadie, and cut my own Christmas Tree. I haven't done that since I was a child. I noticed already that pot holes were appearing on Highway #2, and remembered how we complained last Spring about the condition of the roads and city streets - rough and uneven.

Sometimes our lives are like that - full of "ups and downs", and we find ourselves using all our energy trying to avoid the "potholes". Even this time of the year, people get stressed out as they fall prey to all the commercialism that has come to be associated with Christmas.

So it is a bit of relief when we arrive at one of those periods in life when things go smoothly, and at the end of the day we can relax knowing that we did all we had to do, and we enjoyed our day. Sometimes these moments are the result of help we receive from another person - maybe our spouse, a colleague at work or a friend who were thoughtful and considerate. When these people touch our lives we ought to be thankful because they made our life a bit smoother.

John the Baptist was such a person - smoothing out the way. That is not the first impression we probably got of him - instead he appears rather rough and wild - ruffled hair and beard, clothing of camel hair and what a strange diet - locusts and wild honey, He didn't mince words in his preaching either - *"Repent, for the kingdom of God is coming upon you!"* He was preparing the way for Jesus.

"Prove your repentance by the fruits you show!" "Prepare!. Already the axe is laid to the root of the tree!" Despite the harshness of his preaching, people listened and they found their lives changed. John helped clear their consciences, to see the road ahead of them, and they way they should go and be read to meet Jesus, the Messiah, their Saviour. In Jesus they would see the Holy One of God - the One sent to gather the people like a flock, the Shepherd of souls, their Redeemer and Saviour.

In today's Gospel, John sees his work as smoothing the way so people would be ready to meet Jesus. We are called to the same work - so how can we smooth the way for other people so they will welcome Jesus into their lives not only at Christmas, but every day?

1. We can practice **generosity**. This is one of the beauties of Christmas - its warmth and gentle spirit seems to thaw our frozen hearts, and instill in us a greater sense of love, and we open our hearts and our wallets to support the poor, the homeless, and the weak and

marginalized in our society. At Christmas, people get a glimpse that peace and goodwill may not be an impossible dream after all.

2. Our greatest give to one another is **friendship**. So many people get stressed out at Christmas - and really, all year long. With the coming of the computer and all the modern technology of communication, people never get away from their work-place. Even homes today are no more than dormitories where people only sleep. So much of our time is spent “making a living”, we have so little time left to “make friends”. But, when Christmas comes, we change - we might just drop in to see the neighbour next door. We take time to send cards, write letters or make a phone call. The newest fad is sending Christmas greeting by email - it’s not something I appreciate as it seems so impersonal. We spend time with family and even parents take some time to play with their children. At Christmas we seem to become “human” again.

Once again, Advent calls us here in this sacred place of St. Mark’s - calls us to continue to build a faith-community where we live together in mutual love & acceptance, trust & respect for each other, where every person is accepted for who he or she is, and where we are prepared to listen to the needs of each other, and support one another amid all the care and uncertainties of life. As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, let us pray for the gifts of **generosity** and **friendship** all year through to help other people face the rough places of life.

Fr James Purchase