

Sunday, June 30, 2013
Isaiah 40:3-5; Mark 1:1-4
Making Space for Jesus

Chicago is not the only place that has massive road projects – we find road projects in Scripture as well.

Isaiah and John the Baptist in Mark declare a massive construction project, - **a road project that is central to God making all things new.**

This road being built is not a highway for pilgrims returning to Jerusalem, **nor** for returning exiles coming from Babylon,
nor those in the Diaspora returning to Jerusalem from Egypt.

Rather, this highway comes from the southeast, the Arabah, and **it is made only for one person**
– a massive undertaking to accommodate one person
– YHWH.

YHWH is returning to Jerusalem

YHWH is coming again to take up residence in Jerusalem.

For the people of God, long in exile – this is indeed good news; GREAT NEWS!

They thought God had long abandoned them.

News of God’s return gets people all excited; it gets them thinking about preparing the way for God’s coming.

Are there any hindrances, any barriers which would impede God’s return?

And so, the prophet declares, “make a way for God, prepare the way for YHWH
– fill in the sinkhole-sized potholes
– level out the mountain-high bumps
– pave over the rough road
– so that nothing, absolutely nothing trips up YHWH returning to Jerusalem.

Let’s jump ahead to the Gospel of Mark!

Mark also talks about preparing
– but presents two kinds of preparing.

First, regarding the messenger who would come to prepare the way.

John was the messenger sent ahead of Jesus, to prepare Jesus’ way (Mal. 3:1), to make space for Jesus in our world:

– make ready a road for God to show up “in the flesh,”
– for God to come to us “face to face,” – for God to show up on our turf.

John is a voice of one calling in the wilderness, “Make ready a way for God to come be among us!”
– God who is Immanuel – God with us!

The second kind of preparing is embodied in a proclamation; a challenge to God's people:

- **in response to Jesus' coming**
- **in response to the embodiment of God's reign in Christ Jesus**
- **in response to God making a personal appearance in human history.**

John's coming indeed makes space for Jesus' arrival,

John proclaims: "open wide your lives, remove the barriers in your lives, receive God who is among you, for God to come into your lives – for God to be with us!"

That is why John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins – a message of setting free!

John proclaims for people to fill in the chasms that trip up (Produce fruit in keeping with your repentance as Matthew relates John's ministry).

John declares to the people for them to make space for Jesus in their lives

- because he will immerse us in the Holy Spirit
- the breath of God
- he will make us new!

How do we hear these texts?

I know how I hear them.

When I hear Isaiah or John, I ask myself, "is the roadway into my life clear, is the roadway clear of barriers? – is my life open to receive God to have unimpeded access into my life?"

"Do I have/make space for Jesus in my life?"

"Am I open to God connecting with me at the core of my being?"

– "am I open to God?"

"What do I need to remove, fill in, pave over so that **a highway for God is prepared in my life?**"

Lest this become "work" we do to receive God, remember God comes to us, so that God may open our hearts so that we might be open to God to have free access into our lives.

Every day when we get up, I encourage us to ask: **What is the condition of the roadway into my life?**

This requires a daily examination – like checking morning traffic

- a daily discipline of checking out the roadway for God into our lives
- a daily prayer that keeps us attentive to God, giving God access into our lives.

This past week Larry had surgery to regain hearing in his right ear (I remember Larry's first words when I saw him again after surgery: "I can hear!")

Prior to surgery, Larry prepared a roadway for God into his life – and prayed – getting rid of the barrier of anxiety.

The prayer he prayed – to open his life to God was this:

“The Light of God surrounds me.
The Love of God enfolds me.
The Power of God protects me.
The Presence of God watches over me.
The Mind of God guides me.
The Life of God flows through me.
The Laws of God direct me.
The Power of God abides within me.
The Joy of God uplifts me.
The Strength of God renews me.
The Beauty of God inspires me.
Wherever I am, God is!”

There are many such prayers that open the roadway for God into our lives:

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.” (St. Francis)

Or even the Serenity Prayer written by Reinhold Niebuhr:

“God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next. Amen.”

For when we prepare a roadway for God to enter into our lives, we become roadways for God to enter into the lives of all kinds of people struggling to clear the rubble out of their lives for God to enter in.

As ones who are the body of Christ in the world, we are called to go into all kinds of places, connect with all kinds of people – to demonstrate how to build a roadway for God.

And this all takes place in the wilderness, the desert.

Now we usually think of wilderness as a dangerous place (when Jesus was tempted, we read that he was with the wild animals – they are out in the wilderness).

Now though, the wilderness can be a dangerous place, the **wilderness is also the place where God brings about God's purpose of making all things new.**

In the wilderness God is revealed – a place where very little is predictable.

But we like it predictable, we like creating predictable environments.

The church has been good at keeping the wild out of the church. But it is in the messy places of our lives, the wilderness experiences, the troubling and dangerous times, that we are most open to see God coming along ways off.

And so when we see God coming, we get about road building.

As we prepare a roadway for God into our lives – like John the Baptist, not hiding in church buildings, but being out there in the wilderness, we help others be open for God to make roadways into their lives, so God can come in – creating something new out of that which is broken and alienated.

It is North American to try and make an easier life for ourselves – to make roadways for ourselves; It is, however, being a disciple of Christ, to help others in wilderness places to clear a roadway for God to enter into their lives.

My prayer for us this morning – as we listen to Isaiah, as we listen to John the Baptist, is that the voice of one calling out in the desert is not just Isaiah or John, but it is indeed each of our voices as well:

(Maybe not on a street corner – but in the everydayness of our lives – may our lives be voices in the wilderness)

“In the **wilderness, prepare, make ready the way** for the LORD;
make straight in the **desert**
a highway for our God.”

In so crying out, we walk with people to fill in the valleys, flatten the mountains, pave over the rough ground – for God to have free access into the lives of people all around us, to bring restoration, hope, transformation, new life – their being made new.

This is who we are!

As we drive about the Chicago area caught in construction:

– offer up a prayer for God to have unimpeded access into every human life – in us and through us
– so that God has free access in this world to make all things new!