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St. Luke 3:1-6:

## **The Most Blessed Reality of Each Day!**

- I. Starts with Real People and Places
- II. The Everyday Person
- III. The Blessed Reality

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St. Luke 3:1-6

Dear Friends in Christ,

F.E. Smith was a noted British lawyer with a quick wit who served as the British attorney from 1915 until 1919. The story goes that he once cross-examined a young man who claimed damages from an arm injury caused by a careless bus driver. "Will you please show us how high you can lift your arm now?" asked Smith. The young man raised his arm to shoulder level, his face agonizing with pain. "Thank-you, said Smith. "And now can you show us how high you could lift it before the accident?" The young man eagerly shot his arm above his head. Case dismissed!

That's an obvious case of deception, and also delusion in the thinking of the young man. He thought he could outwit the lawyer and court. It reminded me of this Word of God as we approach the Last Day: "Therefore God sends them (the Godless) strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (1 Thess.1:11,12)." God deludes those who live in deception. Incredible, isn't it? People will believe what they know is a lie and will do anything to defend it! Incredible...or is it? Look at this world.

Perhaps, what many of us pray this Second Sunday of Advent is the Day of Christ's Second Coming. Only the Lord knows. We praise God because we know the First Coming. The celebration of His birth is mostly seen as insignificant. For us it's . . .

## **THE MOST BLESSED REALITY OF EACH DAY!**

### I. Starts with Real People and Places

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitus, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas...(vv.1,2).

In the first place, we are to understand that most of the names listed here are found in secular history. And we also have to understand that just because secular history might not recognize certain names doesn't mean that the names, and thus the Bible, are fictitious. What's fictitious is some of the thinking and conclusions of secular history. The Bible is a real book of real history. The most important!

In the second place, the people listed are significant and, more than likely, saw themselves as being worthy of their positions. How do these names effect us: Pontius Pilate - Herod - Annas - Caiaphas? How about, cold? Do we revere them? I like David's words: "But who am I, and what is my people...for all things come from you, and of your own we have given you." We understand, everything we are and have and do and give belongs to God, and He gives to us in accordance to His will. David's words say it all" "Our days on earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding (I Chron.29:15b)."

And that brings us to this: "...the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness (v.2)." John the Baptist. Totally insignificant to this world. A nothing! But of the names I've mentioned, which ones evoke Godly thoughts, thankfulness and respect. Which ones are on the top of the list. Of course, David and John. John brings us to these words of our text . . .

### II. The Everyday Person

And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness; 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God (vv.3-6).

We've been through this many times. We each have to labor to take care of life's concerns. But the greatest concern takes everyone to life's last moment. I have to repeat this; I must repeat this: Every Sunday the pastors stand here and see all the faces we know and love. A good number of you we've known for many years. There's the Sunday morning greeting, the smile, some talk, maybe a laugh, or maybe a tear. And sometime after that moment, on another day, a phone call or a stop by the church, followed by a trip to the hospital, followed by a journey of struggle, followed by the last words spoken at a grave side. We've seen it many times. We'll continue to see it until God calls us to Him. You see, it grows more difficult to say good-bye, though we rejoice in the victory.

And so, our text states: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness; 'Prepare the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight.'" Regarding the paths P.E. Kretzmann's commentary is excellent:

...let no one be indifferent to (Christ's) advent (His first coming). Make the highways straight... (that is) let all hypocrisy be removed far from you... Every ravine shall be filled up; all anxious minds and discouraged hearts shall take confident courage, for the King is coming to pay the penalty for, and forgive, all their sins. Every mountain and hill shall be made low; (that is) all self-righteousness, proud spirits shall be broken and brought to the understanding that without Jesus they cannot escape the wrath to come. The tortuous and crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places shall be made smooth; (that is) all those who are lost in the error of their own lusts, all those that are seeking, by devious ways, to enter into life, should cast their foolish thoughts far from them and come to Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Kretzmann, Popular Commentary of the Bible, New Testament, Vol. I, pp.279,280).

You see, an everyday person before Almighty God is a person who humbles themselves before the Lord and confesses, "I, a poor miserable sinner, confess all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended you and justly deserve your present and eternal punishment." Such a person might be somebody in the eyes of some people, but the person understands that without Christ they (we) are just sinful people before our Holy God! We are worthy and deserving of nothing from God except His wrath because of our sin. The meaning of that has always been made very clear in these words of Paul: "None is righteous, no not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good not even one (Rom.3:1-12.)"

### III. The Blessed Reality

Our Lutheran Confessions state (from Tappert, Solid Declaration, 543.22):

When we teach that through the Holy Spirit's work we are reborn and justified, we do not mean that after regeneration no unrighteousness (sin) in essence and life adheres to those who have been justified and regenerated, but we hold that Christ with his perfect obedience covers all our sins which throughout this life still inhere in our nature. Nevertheless, they are regarded as holy and righteous through faith and for the sake of Christ's obedience...

What I just read is one sentence. I have always been thankful for the comfort it gives. I want to connect it to the following Scriptures: "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us (Ps. 103:11,12)." They're out of sight, forgiven, forgotten. And, as written, "Who is a God like you, pardoning the iniquity and passing over transgressions for the remnant of his inheritance (Micah 7:18)"? "The remnant" is that peace of his church which has been on this earth, from the past to the present, and will be here at the last moment, though it will be a very small number. It's Jesus who said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (Jn.10:11)."

Here are the points we want to remember: 1-God comes to give salvation, to save sinful, undeserving, everyday people; 2-the giving of salvation came through the blood of Christ which covers our sin; 3-when our life in this world ends, everyday undeserving people who held on to Jesus will enter eternal life; 4-on that day when Christ returns and graves are opened, sinful, everyday people who trusted in Jesus will be standing in His presence in their resurrected bodies. Nothing new, right? But, how quickly it can be set aside for everything else.

I'm reasonably sure that most everyone here remembers the man Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and rich. He was a somebody nobody liked. There was that point when Jesus said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry...for I must stay at your home today (Lk.10:5b)." We're told that when the people saw it, "they all grumbled, 'He has gone in to be the guest of a sinner (v.7).... And Zacchaeus said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.' And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house...For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost (Lk.19:8-10).'"

As children of God, when we examine some of our thinking, saying, and doing how do we feel about ourselves?. David said, "Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings...(Ps.17:8)." This is who we each are to the Lord: *the apple of His eye* covered by *the shadow of His wings* - that is, His love for us in Christ!. Forever! This is **the most blessed reality of each day:** Jesus loves us! This I know.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott