4th Wednesday in Advent
Rolling Meadows - 1966

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

Isaiah 40: 3-5 A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed."

To appreciate the full impact of this text, you must be able to visualiz two men - roughshod in appearance - living off the hard land and bare sustenance of the desert wilderness - eating locusts & wild honey - both of whom God had singularly given a powerful set of lungs and vocal chords that could pierce, and penetrate, and cut through to the very marrow of a man's being. The first is Isaiah, the prophet of God, who lived 700 years before the coming of Christ. The second is John the Baptist, a second Isaiah, immediate forerunner of Christ and the greatest man ever born of woman. Lifting up their voices with a volumn and magnitude that cannot be duplicated - ~~and which modern loud speakers could not begin to reproduce~~ not even with our modern amplifiers & loud speakers - they cried out from the crisp, dry air of the wilderness in coarse, sharp, spine-tingling tones: PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD; MAKE STRAIGHT IN THE DESERT A HIGHWAY FOR OUR GOD!

The picture is that of ancient times when couriers and heralds were sent ahead into every city, and village, and hamlet, through which the king would pass on his journey. Upon receiving the news that their king was coming, the towns-people would immediately begin preparations - men, women, and children - slaves ar free - they all pitched in - feverishly working night and day - constructing new roads - cutting through hillsides - filling up the lowlands - building bridges - so that the king and his company might have straight and smooth passage to ~~his~~ their destination.

I don't have to tell you what this means - it is a clear and unmistak-able description of REPENTANCE. On the crest of a new Christtide, the world is still striving to find its joys, and its pleasures, and its peace in the husks of the far country - in drinking, and dancing, and God-forgetting - in a momentary shot of L S D that will perhaps carry them ~~at least momentarily~~ through the holidays & wilderness of their sins - - in wild office parties, and key clubs, and wife swapping, and illicit sex! What mountains have to be brought low - what valleys of sin need to be filled up!

People talk so glibly about the Christmas spirit - brotherhood - peace on earth - good will toward men - and it is all so very shallow and so very hollow - it is an empty calling into the night - because they want it without their King - they want it in terms of their own sweat and achievements - they want it for all practical purposes without the ChristChild. Look at the empty faces along the bar - hollow men, stuffed men, leaning together! Look at the empty faces of the multitudes of shoppers in these days, fighting their way with clenched fists to the counter! Look at the empty faces of people even in our own congregation who have never really listened with hearing ears to the heralding cries of Isaiah and the Baptizer: Prepare the way of the Lord! - who have never really seriously heeded the summons to repentance and faith!

If you haven't had the heart or the courage to do so before, I plead wit you now to stop and look around at the world of Viet Nam, of H-bombs, of fear and hate, of riots in the streets, of the men who say that God is dead. These are but a few of the signs of our troubled times - only a few of the marks of the wilderne in which we are living. Beyond the carols, and the lights, and the snow, there is a vast loneliness, and futility, and boredom. The full measure of the world's unhappiness can be seen clearly only in the light of Christmas - Bethlehem, the Manger, the Mother, the Child under our tree - Bedlam, hate, fear, hunger under th stars! Year by year the world stands more solidly against the light of Christmas, and casts deeper shadows.... I have no room and no sympathy for the easy optimism that men croon about during these days. We were and are alone - children of the dust - visitors in time and strangers in eternity - lost in the far places of sin! If this were not true, there would have been no need for that first Christmas - for God's giving His own, dear Son into our world of vanity and vice. There were soldiers then and wars we have forgotten, and fear, and pain. The world was what it is - men were what we are - and it was for a world like this and men like us that Christ was born in Bethlehem.

PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD; MAKE STRAIGHT IN THE DESERT A HIGHWAY FOR OUR GOD! Repentance, like everything else, must begin at home - within your own

heart. Both Isaiah and John the Baptizer made this point clear! Neither decried the sad situation of the world about them until they had first confronted the sorry state of the people to whom they were called to be prophets. And If I am to be faithful to my calling, I, too, can do no different. The world today is filled with righteous people, righteous to the teeth - pietists, and puritists, and do-gooders of all shapes and sizes! Like the religious people of Isaiah's time and John's time, they know exactly who should hear this message of repentance: - their neighbors and, possibly, even their friends; the great sinners, the unbelievers, the non-church members; everyone, in other words, except those upon whom ~~these~~ the prophets put their branding iron! Repent, and quit bragging about what wonderful people you are, what wonderful ancestry you have enjoyed, and what marvelous resources you have at your disposal.

Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand! These words are directed to us - to all of us. This has to be said, for it is difficult for people in our day to realize the need for repentance. Everything stands in the way of repentance — material prosperity, cultural pride, philosophical mumbo-jumbo, and all the rest of the paraphernalia we have allowed to clutter up our lives. Religion itself can stand as a barrier between us and our God when it prevents us from being truly and personally penitent. Don't say you are the children of Abraham, John warned, for God can raise up from these stones children to Abraham!...Don't say, John would say to us, we are good members of the church, and we contibute regularly toward its support. Don't try to escape from the obligation of repentance by hiding behind the skirts of the church. God can raise up church members from the pews on which you are sitting. You are not indispensable to God - God is indispensable to you. Repent, therefore, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.... PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD.

Repentance means a right-about-face - a total revision or reversal in our lives. Turning about in the Christian sense, however, does not just mean that from now on we are going to do better - rather it means the willingness to come clean and confess our sins - it means going home to Him who has done all things well and has

To put an end to the phony cover-up

forgiven all that we have done wrong. It does not mean simply becoming a good person - who could seriously hope to achieve this! - but rather committing and entrusting ourselves to Him who is good to us. The Bible says with breath-taking simplicity that in spite of ourselves God is good and friendly toward us. It says that God is willing to pay a tremendous price to pursue us down to the very depths of our life. It says that the Son of God does not merely call to us from the remote security of heaven, but that He came right down into our life - that He appears at the very place where we men are grappling with the powers of sin and suffering and death - and that He stands beside us and takes it all upon Himself in order to be our Brother. ~~THIS~~ The IS NONE OTHER THAN YOUR ~~KING~~! Lord!

There is only one way to receive Him - in contrition and repentance! Fall on your knees - in the dust, and dirt, and desert of your own helplessness and weariness, and worthlessness! PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD! MAKE STRAIGHT IN THE DESERT A HIGHWAY FOR OUR GOD! He brings the only peace, and joy, and life that there is. On your knees, then, that he may travel across the road of your life and reach His destiny -- your heart! Amen.