

WGUMC December 6, 2015 Luke 3:1-6
"Making a Way Home"

Luke begins the Third Chapter by scanning the scene and locating all the power-brokers: Tiberius is in Rome; Pilate is in Judea; Herod is in Galilee; Philip is in Ituraea and Trachonitis; Lysanias is in Abilene; and Anna and Caiaphas are in Jerusalem. They each have their place, but none of them has a home. They all have power, power that was either taken by them or given to them. And they are all anxious about that power because people in high places know that it can just as easily be taken from them.

The only one in this story who is truly "home" right where he is is John who is in the wilderness. He is home there because that is where the Word of God comes to him.

Last week, I asked you whether the Word of God can come home again and where Jesus would choose to come home. In this story, the Word of God chooses to come home to a desolate place far outside the palaces of power—a place that

doesn't look anything like the home of God. And that's Good News for us. That means that Jesus can come home to the likes of us, even if we have a dirty laundry hanging in the windows and a broken heart over the doorway.

So what Good News does John the Baptist bring to us? He brings a task for us. He says, "Prepare the way of the Lord." But how can we prepare the way if we don't know the way? Even Thomas, who had traveled with the Lord for three years, confessed that he didn't know where Jesus was going, so how could he know the way? [John 14:5]

John says that to prepare the way of the Lord means to make his paths straight. Great. Because I don't know how we are supposed to make the path straight when everything in our world is so crooked and twisted. Just one example: today we have too many folks who don't want to prepare the way because they are busying blocking the way. Despite the fact that the Bible says that we should treat the alien as a citizen

[Leviticus 19:34] they say, "Let's build more walls, erect more roadblocks, and set up more surveillance." Instead of making a way home for the immigrant and the refugee, they are trying to scare us so that we won't welcome them into our communities. We can't even think straight, so how on earth are we supposed to make his paths straight?

When it's so easy to see problems, how do we prepare the way for the solution? How can we prepare ourselves or anyone else to see salvation? Whenever we are lost and don't know the way, remember this: the Gospel of John says *Jesus* is the Way. What that means for Christians is that Jesus is how God comes home to us and Jesus is how we get home to God. Unfortunately, there are some things that are standing in our way.

Quoting Isaiah, John says that there are valleys that need to be filled, mountains and hills that need to be leveled, crooked places that need to be made straight, and rough

places that need to be made smooth. This landscape is a good metaphor for our lives.

I know that there are some days when our lives are so crooked we can't see straight. Our situation is so convoluted that we can't see beyond the next turn in the road, so we can't see where home is or make plans for how to get there.

In the last year, some of us have walked through the valley of the shadow of death and desperately need to be filled up with life. We have lost parents and loved ones and can't imagine how we could ever feel like we were at home without them.

Not naming any names, but some of us have egos bigger than mountains and they need to be brought low, low enough to see that we didn't earn everything we have and we don't have everything we need. We won't get home until we realize that we can't get there on our own.

Some of us can't get home because we have fears as big as mountains: so high we can't get over them, so low we can't get under them, so wide we can't get around them. But if don't go in at the door, if we don't let God help us face them, God can't help us remove them.

Some of us were born into homes that we don't want to come home to. These homes were a desolate wilderness for us when we were living there. Because of that, we are a little rough around the edges. We're a little raw in our emotions, a little too sensitive in our relationships or a little harsh in our judgment. Coming home for us is a long process of God's grace gradually smoothing us over, like a rock at the bottom of a river.

But whatever kind of home we were born into, by now, we all live in the same landscape. The wilderness that John is in is the life that we all live in. And the quickest way to make our way home to God and one of the best ways we can prepare for

God's come home to us is for us to make a way home for others. It's in the work of leading others home that we discover that we're already there. But if we string up the barbed wire, if we put up roadblocks so that others can't make it safely home, neither can God, neither can we.

Now is a good time to remember that the Pilgrims were refugees. And almost all of us are the children of immigrants who were fleeing something when they came to this country. Spiritually, we have all been refugees, fleeing from sin and trying to make a way home to forgiveness. So we could give the refugees from Syria the same chance we were given. We would soften the rhetoric, remove some of the roadblocks, straighten the path and prepare a way home for more of them. Pope Francis told his bishops in Europe: have every parish take in one refugee family.

But even if we can't do much to change the direction of our foreign policy, I know that there are many displaced

persons right here in Santa Clara County. There are young people and abused women who have fled their homes. There are working families and seniors and people with mental and physical disabilities who have been priced out of a home. And there are parolees who don't know what it means to be home. They are all seeking refuge. Now we have a lot of churches in this city, and they could all be resettlement centers for people who live right here and who just want a way to go home.

On Tuesday night, the City Council will be considering a recommendation to make it easier for churches to shelter those without homes during this cold and rainy winter. They will be voting on whether they should waive the high fees and the long permitting process to allow churches to house the homeless on a temporary, emergency basis. I hope that if you are able, you will make an effort to get to that meeting to show the Council that there are Christians in this town who are committed to living their faith and who are eager to serve their

community and to help prepare the way for at least some of God's children to come home this winter.

When I was a pastor in Novato, I lived on the church property. One day I noticed a car parked by the fence and five young adults in dreadlocks milling around it. I asked them if they needed help. They explained that they were on their way from Washington to a traditional folk music festival in Berkeley and wanted to know if they could pitch a tent in the back 40. One of their parents had told them that if they ever ran out of money, they should just look for a Methodist Church and ask if they could sleep there. They knew how to make my day. How wonderful is it they saw Methodists as people who will make a home for God's children, even a temporary one. And not only did these young home-seekers spend the night, but one of my parishioners, a retired policeman, helped them retrieve the car key they had locked in their trunk the next morning, then took them home for showers and a hot breakfast before sending

them on their way. It really isn't that hard when you think about it. Do you want to prepare the way of the Lord to come home to you while you are preparing to come home to God this Christmas? Make his paths a little straighter by making a way home for someone else.