



GPS GUIDE: NOVEMBER 26, 2023 G r o w . P r a y . S t u d y .

Sermon: Jesus is Lord

Monday: Read Luke 3:1-6

Interestingly, Luke begins John's story with what seems like a history lesson: *In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee... the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.* Perhaps Luke does that to remind us that in a world full of these terribly important and powerful people – emperors and kings and governors and religious leaders – the word of God didn't come where you would expect it. Instead, the word of God came to John not in a palace or a temple or a synagogue, but in the wilderness. So maybe Luke is telling us that John is preparing the way for a God that is going to surprise us. Or perhaps Luke gives us this history lesson to set the stage, to orient us to what was going on in the world when John started preaching, and to point out all those important folks who missed the boat about Jesus, even with John pointing the way. But maybe, just maybe, Luke is telling us this story is no fairy tale. John's story doesn't take place once upon a time. The word of God doesn't come to John in a land far away. Instead, John's story begins in the immediacy of history. It begins right where we are. In the third year of Joe Biden's presidency, when Kay Ivey serves as governor of Alabama, and Gary Palmer sits in the House of Representatives, when Teri Hord Owens is the General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the year 2023, the word of God comes to John... And through John, the word of God comes to us. How does the world around us affect the way we hear this word? What needs to be done, here and now, to prepare the way of the Lord?

Prayer: Holy God, help me to make ready for the Kin-dom of God. Amen.

Tuesday: Read Luke 3:7-20

John's message isn't exactly an easy one to hear. "You brood of vipers!" Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" It doesn't sound good, but Luke says it is: "He proclaimed the good news to the people." Good news? "Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit, is cut down and thrown into the fire." That is good news says Luke. Well, what's so good about it?

Well for one thing, good news doesn't always start off happy. Remember our faith begins with a cross. But what makes John's news so good, I think, is that we know it is real, it is true, it is solid. John comes and strips away all our pretense, all our fantasy, all our illusion. Parker Palmer once said that, "[T]he pursuit of happiness is the pursuit of reality, because illusion never leaves us ultimately happy... [T]he opportunity now, is for us to get real. And I think that is going to make us, in the long run, more happy." Maybe that's something of what God is trying to get at, out in the desert: God's coming into the world, and if you want to be a part of that, you have to get ready. God's coming into the world and it doesn't look like a Norman Rockwell painting. God's coming into the world, precisely because it isn't perfect. Fred Craddock reminds us that we've got to lose the false notion, that where the Messiah is, there is no misery. It's the other way around: where there's misery, there's the Messiah. When have you had to face a truth that was difficult to hear? In what ways did it lead to healing?

Prayer: Loving God, help us to hear and face the truth. Amen.

Wednesday: Read Luke 4:14-21

This is Luke's first description of Jesus' public ministry. First things matter in the Gospels because they set the tone and name the priorities for what is to come. It's important to Luke for us to know that Jesus comes filled with power and, perhaps, even more, it's important to Luke for us to know just what this kind of power looks like. This makes Jesus' choice of reading from the scroll in Isaiah very interesting, because if there is one thing all the people referenced by Isaiah have in common, it's that they are definitely *not* the powerful people in the world. Filled by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus testifies to the fact that God's power is always seen as peculiar and odd – even uncomfortable – by the world's standards, because it focuses on those the world has overlooked, forgotten, or discarded. He knows that God sees all, loves all, and intends to redeem all. I wonder what change could come the world if our individual and collective energies were filled by the power of Jesus' mission: bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, bringing renewed vision where darkness has prevailed for far too long, letting the oppressed go free, and releasing from debt those whose redemption seemed impossible. What would it mean to embrace Jesus' powerful mission as your own? What would it mean for our congregation? For our community?

Prayer: May we, filled with the power of the Spirit, take up your mission, O Lord. Amen.

Thursday: Read Micah 5:1-5

Micah's oracle speaks to a world caught be in the bewilderment of violence, uncertainty, and economic disruption. While there is much that separates us from eighth-century Judah, these dynamics are not unlike the world in which we live. We too know terror and fragility on personal, national, and international levels. We too seek hope that the world will be different. We too yearn for security and peace. The promise of Micah is that God will be faithful and appear in surprising ways. Micah invites us to look for God's presence where we least expect it, and to be attuned to the voices of the small, the powerless, and the vulnerable. Are you prepared to be

surprised? Are you prepared for a God who arrives in the most unexpected places? Are you prepared to welcome the Holy One?

Prayer: God of Surprises, keep my eyes open for your coming. Amen.

Friday: Read John 12:27-36

"We wish to see Jesus," this plea from the Gentiles is one that echoes in our hearts and minds as we walk the path of faith. The mysteries of God are an indivisible whole. If we become immersed with one, we are led to all of the others. Thus, the way from Bethlehem leads inevitable to Golgotha, from the crib to the cross. To "see" Jesus, "... to become children of the light," we must be willing to follow even the footsteps of pain and suffering, and in following Jesus we find, that somehow, the depth and breadth of love of our God has taken root in us. Where do you "see" Jesus most often? How might you be a "child of the light" for someone else?

Prayer: Jesus, help us to follow in your footsteps, practicing the way of love. Amen.

Saturday: Read Psalm 40:1-5

The medium has to fit the message, and there really seems to be no better way to share the Good News of God coming into the world than to join our voices together and sing. The first and best response to the good news of great joy is to sing. When Mary first begins to grasp who it is she carries in her womb, she sings: *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.* When the angels announce the Good News to the shepherds, they sing: *Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those who he favors!* When Simeon first glimpses the infant Messiah in the Temple, he sings: *Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation.* Like the line of the great hymn, "If love is lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?" Tomorrow, we begin the season of Advent as we prepare for the birth of the Christ Child. What is the song you will sing today?

Prayer: Put a new song in my mouth, O God, a song of praise to you. Amen.

