

Greetings;

As I write this, Thanksgiving Day has come and gone, opening the way to the season of Advent and Christmas. All of our schedules change and adapt to make way for the holiday activities. "Holiday" or for us who are people of faith, "Holy Day" celebrations can sometimes get in the way of what we are trying to honor or celebrate.

The holiness of the day can easily be obliterated by the busyness or the special-ness of our activities. This happens quite a lot at Christmas: Jesus is completely lost in the craziness of parties, gift buying, giving and receiving, warm (or maybe no-so-warm) family moments, and other activities of the season. There must be a better way. Is it even possible in this day and age to celebrate Christmas and not forget Jesus?

John the Baptist (and Isaiah before him), cried out in the wilderness, *"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."* (Luke 3:4-6)

How does this help us get ready for Jesus' arrival? Let us unpack the Scripture a little and try to bring it into our context:

- The term "wilderness" in the Bible generally means not just desert, but a place that is uncontrolled, dangerous, and frightening.

- The term "way" means not just a road, but a path of life, that is, the direction one takes through life choices and opportunities – the direction and manner in which we travel.
- Continuing the "way" metaphor, one can easily conceive of hills and valleys, of time when the going became more difficult or frightening as well as of times of rough going. Struggles, rough going, and tough travel have been a part of the human condition and continue to mark our journeys through this life.

These ancient travel instructions are easily translated into the today's "lifestyles of the harried and harassed." We can relate to the fear and dread of being lost in a wilderness-type of life situation where we wonder what will try to destroy us next, what horrid thing will befall us, and why are we so alone and afraid.

But what is John telling us to do? To prepare the way, making his paths straight. Have you ever watched a road grader level out a roadway in preparation for pavement? Have you ever seen a bulldozer moving dirt around to bring order to the chaos of a vacant lot? What bulldozers and graders can we use in our lives?

Try these:

- Unbounded forgiveness (like we received from God because of Jesus, whose birth we are celebrating).

- Proactive and unrelenting love (again, like we receive from God in Jesus).
 - Celebrate the successes of others, building them up.
 - Freely empathize with any who are struggling.
 - Realize that our relationships are the most precious gifts that God has given us (sometimes that's a little hard to see).
 - Rejoice that God sent Jesus to us, to bring us hope, love, peace and joy.

You will be amazed at how putting these attitudes and actions in place in your life smooths the path, making the way for Jesus to be present in your life, family and world. Merry CHRISTmas!

Your servant in Christ,
Pastor Jack

The Scripture readings and sermon titles for worship in December are:

December 2nd: Jeremiah 33:14-16; Luke 21:25-26

Sermon Title – “Signs”

December 9th: Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 1:67-80; Luke 3:1-6

Sermon Title – “The Benedictus”

December 16th: Philippians 4:4-7; Isaiah 12:2-6;

Sermon Title – “The Saint of Sharing”

December 23rd: Micah 5:2-15; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45; Luke 46-55

Sermon Title – “God’s Grace”

December 23rd: Christmas Candlelight Service – 5:00 P.M.

December 30th: 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Psalm 148; Luke 2:41-52

Sermon Title – “Perfect Obedience”

Pray this month for these sister churches in the ECO Presbytery of Florida

- Pasadena Presbyterian Church, St. Petersburg
- St. Stephens Presbyterian Church, Orlando
- Trinity Wellsprings, Satellite Beach
- Woodbury Presbyterian Church, Orlando

For the church plants

- Providencia Presbyterian Church, North Palm Beach
- The Grove Church, Port St. Lucie