

## Sermon 12-06-09 Luke 3:1-6

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1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4 as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; 6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' "

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No more business as usual. That's the message that John the Baptist wants us to hear loud and clear again this morning. No more business as usual. He invites us to defect from the status quo and to conspire with God to become the change that God is already at work bringing about in our world.

Luke sets the prophetic word of John the Baptist over and against the political and religious figures of the day. Today it might sound something like this, "In the first year of President Obama, when Mitch Daniels was governor of Indiana, and Goodnight the mayor of Kokomo, when Osteen and Hagee could be heard hour upon hour on religious broadcast stations, the word of God came to John in the wilderness. Luke lists 7 political and religious figures of the day, to root John's appearance in history, yes, but even more than that. I think he also wanted to show how John's message stood out against the political and religious leaders of the day. John continues to this day to be counter-cultural, and if we listen closely we might even hear an invitation for us to defect from 'business as usual'.

Today, John has some co-conspirators, who've put together a little promo video on You Tube in order to invite others to join their Advent Conspiracy. Let's watch it together ([www.adventconspiracy.org](http://www.adventconspiracy.org)). This video makes the point that just 2.2% of what is spent on Christmas presents could provide clean water for everyone in the world. Like John the Baptist it invites us to defect from business as usual, and envision a changed world, a more equitable and just world, a world where armed conflict, terrorism, hunger, and environmental degradation are all things of the past.

Today, we hear anew the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. It's a whole new world that he brings, a more equitable world, where every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, a more just world where the crooked shall be made straight, and a more secure world where the rough ways are made smooth.

Can you begin to envision it? What things do we need to unlearn in order to prepare for this vastly changed way of life, this salvation, that Jesus brings? How are we invested in the dominant societal machinery in place today that tells us to spend in order to stimulate the economy? Are we willing to defect from business as usual, and begin living out of this new vision of the way our world can be, right here, right now?

John has a word for such defection. He calls it repentance. It's a U-turn, a whole new way of living with changed heart and changed mind. It's no more business as usual. In his insightful book, *Everything Must Change*, Brian McLaren says that a change in our 'inner ecology' will bring about a change in 'global ecology.'

And here's the thing about changing our 'inner ecology.' It's not something that we make happen. It's more something that we allow to happen. It's when John's vision of equity in the world becomes our vision. It's when we see our connectedness to all things. Poverty of any sort is our poverty. Lack of adequate drinking water is our lack as well. Preparing the way of the Lord if it means anything at all means becoming open for vast changes within us. The mountains to be laid low and the valleys lifted up are none other than the mountains and valleys in our hearts. Here is where the path is made straight for the Lord to enter and fill us with a new vision.

In his final chapter McLaren sums up his new vision this way: "At the center of the beloved community is good news – a framing story that calls humanity to creativity, harmony, reconciliation, justice virtue, integrity, and peace, because these values reflect the character of the Creator whose world is our home and in whose presence we live and move and have our being. In short: we are all part of one kingdom, one beautiful whole with one caring Creator, who is faithful to us even in our stupidity and sin. God calls us to reconcile with God, one another, and creation, to defect from the false stories that divide and destroy us, and to join God in the healing of the world through love and the pursuit of justice and the common good."

Jim Wallis says that politicians will likely never change the way they go about getting elected. They wet their fingers put them in the air to determine which way the wind is blowing and then make that their platform. Change in the world comes not by changing politicians, but by changing the direction of the wind. Change comes as more and more people defect from business as usual and catch God's vision for what the world can be and the wind shifts.

Today, we feel another gust blowing our way from the mouth of John the Baptist. Is it strong enough to open your heart, to change your mind, to change your life?

Graciela lived in the moderate climate of northern Argentina. One day she was visiting her sister in the south of the country and they decided to take a drive up into the mountains. It was just a tourist trip, and Graciela never would have guessed how it would change her life. Up in the mountains they came across a village of indigenous people living in extreme poverty. Trying to eke out a living in the harsh cold climate. These people had at one-time centuries before lived in the north, where Graciela now lived. But, since that land was the most desirable for agriculture, the conquistadors and Spanish colonist had pushed the indigenous people south. When the colonist desired the coastlands of the south, they were then pushed up into the mountains, where they struggled to just survive.

Graciela's heart broke upon meeting these people, and she vowed that she would help them. She spent some time getting to know them, gained their trust, and then asked them what they most needed. They responded that they would like a school for their village, a place for their children to learn and grow.

Graciela and her husband Luiz went to work recruiting others in their town to help with this project, an architect volunteered to draw up blueprints, others volunteer their time, skills, and

materials. Many people of their town made the 30-hour trip by train or car south to the village to help with the construction of the school. Even the mayor got involved. When it was all completed the villagers had one more request. They wanted the government to own and run the school. The government officials in the area at first didn't quite know what to do, no one had ever given them a school before. But this was an important piece, for if the government ran the school, then the people in this mountain village could no longer be forgotten peoples. Graciela and her town were like the wind blowing in a new direction. They made it happen.

This story illustrates the mountains being made low, and the valleys filled in. It's a story where we can glimpse, in the words of John the Baptist, the salvation of our God. Yes, all flesh will see the salvation of our God.

Salvation is when our hearts become God's heart, caring for the poor, the lonely, the outcasts and forgotten ones. It's when we catch God's vision of our world in which people live in peace and steward the whole creation in order to provide abundant life for all creatures here and now as well as for many generations to come.

God is already at work in the world bringing it about. Today, we're invited to defect from the 'business as usual' status quo world and join God's Advent Conspiracy. Be forewarned, it will mean change.