

“Soothing & Smoothing Our Rough Roads ”
C, Advent Two; Luke 3:1-6
December 9, 2018; 10:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

“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.”

I. ROUGH ROADS ALL AROUND

Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make the paths straight. Get ready. Hang the greens, fill that tree with Chrismons, order up the poinsettias, light the candles, tune up the carols, revel in the concerts and parades, make the cookies, shop for the gifts, set up the Nativity scene!

Plan your gatherings, sign-up for the Vigil, welcome the cold and hungry in. Wish your friends and neighbors Happy Hanukah, Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, or whatever it is that most honors their culture and traditions.

For it is Advent, and we are waiting, and preparing. Getting ready! The prophets who first declared: “Prepare the way of the Lord” couldn’t quite have imagined all the preparing *we* do in our culture and context—and I’m sure they could never have foreseen tinsel and reindeer and lines outside the shopping malls for the latest gadgets.

But, they *did* know that all of this – all this waiting, preparing, getting ready—is about the same thing – a longing, deep in our hearts for the holy presence –the incarnation of Love. We long to fill whatever is unfulfilled inside of us: with Hope, Peace, Love and Joy. That is what we prepare for in this season of yearning and preparing.

Today, we embark on the road – the Way of the Lord – the Way of Peace. The prophets tell us that there rough roads behind and before us. But we don’t need to read the scriptures to know that! We have been on some rough roads in many ways in these times – in our families, our community, our world.

This scripture leapt off the page at me this week:

the crooked shall be made straight,

and the rough ways made smooth;

⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

This is not just a “pipe dream” – a “pie in the sky by and by – that we long for God to intervene and “DO something, already.” It’s a “marching order.” A guiding principle for us as the people of God. *We* are to get on the road with the Spirit and level out those rough hills and valleys for one another. To come alongside each other – strangers and friends alike – and soothe and smooth out the rough roads for each other. So that “all flesh shall see the salvation of God” –together!

Why did this hit so profoundly? Because I see it all around! And I have been brought to my knees in overwhelming gratitude and awe as I have received incredible love and care recently while my family’s road has been extremely rough. *And*, I have witnessed amazing acts of love and care for many others too –in this place and beyond.

And, we have seen too many examples in the news of systems and factions make the road *rougher* for our neighbors and “the least of these.” Hint: We don’t make the road smoother for our neighbors by throwing rubber bullets and tear gas!

Or, by building walls instead of bridges; of making it harder to vote or obtain legal status instead of easier. More red tape, more bureaucracy, more taking away of rights and equality instead of evening out the hills and valleys and crooked roads.

II. ONE BATH AT A TIME

Sharon Rhodes-Wickett, in *Collapsing the Distance between Heaven and Earth* shares a story:

At the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Sierra Leone, West Africa. The meetings were held in the large sanctuary in the capital city, Freetown. Each day as we entered the large doors into the sanctuary there was a young girl, maybe about the age of 8, who begged at the door. She looked ragged, dirty, her hair was matted and knotty, and she had on tattered clothes. No one seemed to know her, and people brushed her aside upon entering. Some of the pastors tried to tell her to go away. We were busy doing the work of the church. She was a bother. This went on for several days.

As I sat in the pew observing the Conference one day, my peripheral vision caught some motion outside. I looked out the window, and there on the patio, outside the sanctuary was a woman, a lay member of the conference. She found a bucket and some soap. Although dressed in a beautiful traditional tie-dye gown, she pushed up her sleeves, and she was giving that 8-year-old girl a bath. She soaped up her hair and was tenderly making her all clean and new. She washed the clothes the child had been wearing, and they were spread out on the bushes in the sun drying. The woman went out and got another dress for her to wear, too.

Hundreds of pastors and devoted laypersons poured into the Methodist Church of Freetown to do the work of the church. But outside, on the edges, quietly and without notice, the work of redemption - the work of Jesus Christ was being done. It was not the work of committees and

reports and programs. It was the work of soap and water and human touch and being able to see the face of Jesus in that of an abandoned 8-year-old girl.

III. SOOTHING AND SMOOTHING

So, our pondering today, this second week of Advent, is this: How do we make the rough places smoother for each other? Where have we seen loving examples of soothing and smoothing that we can build on and give thanks for?

Remember: We don’t do it all by ourselves!!! And thank God, we don’t have to. Spirit helps us.

Look at passage – John the Baptist didn’t do the smoothing. Nor did Jesus do it without God’s help.

At a time of death: (or even just busyness or chaos!)

Meals, cards, notes, hugs, tears, concern –ALL matter!

Comfort food is the nectar of the divine.

Practical help – planning a worship service and decorating!

Covering meetings and projects so the bereaved can grieve.

All those things make the road smoother.

All are things we can do for one another at any time

Be extra gentle with one another: remember that we’re not always our best selves when grieving, or in the midst of conflict, or hurting for any reason.

Doing whatever we can to “Build up the body” (Eph 3)

So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. (Romans)

Working together and good communication – not triangulating—makes the rough road smooth for a family, community, congregation

Pastoral Relations Committee – seeking to do just that
A smoother road with healthy communication channels

Nominating miracle – you all made the road SO MUCH smoother this Fall by saying YES!!! By affirming the task force

and leaders that all their hard work these many months was not in vain! That change is a good thing and we are on a new path into a very bright future as a congregation!

I asked around to others what they do to soothe and smooth. I received a wonderful response—everything from “tea and sympathy” to pies in the freezer, put there by God! (see below)

I looked around the church this week and saw all sorts of folks looking out for each other, offering rides and support. Tears and calls and hugs coming alongside several grieving families. Support for concerts and programs and music and Christmas plans here in the church and throughout the community.

IV. LESSONS FROM MAMA ON GRIEF

Rough to lose your mom. Very primal. The person who has been there since before your birth. Who carried you. Whether a good relationship or bad, that fact carries through! And my relationship was very good with my mom – even though she was pretty strict and not super-cuddly and coddling ☺

What my family and I did to smooth the rough road this week – in partnership. Talked on phone, texted and emails a lot –just wanted to be close. Made sure to consult on every step so no one would feel left out. OR, that Grandma’s paintings wouldn’t accidentally get hauled off to Goodwill!

Wore clothes that reminded me of her. Bought clothes! yes, Retail therapy can be helpful at times! I didn’t get out of control, but did find a pinkish fluffy bathrobe on sale at Murdoch’s that just spoke of my mom and allowed me to wrap myself up by the fire in loving comfort and memories.

And.....brought back countless memories of hauling off to the mall on Christmas Eve day with my dad because he hadn’t gotten around to getting the new robe my mom wanted! He’d gotten everything *else* on her Christmas List –he didn’t seem to think those lists were a “list of options” but a mandate and

would buy everything on it! From microwaves to slippers. To robes. And we weren’t rich.

And, I had my nails done in the brightest pinky/red color I could find, and every single time I look at my hands, I remember Mom and her love of bright – we’re talking NEON pink!

Let the tears come. Whenever, wherever they will.
Loved on my mother-in-law and church moms a lot

I talked with Mom. Asked for her and heaven’s help with some difficult situations in our family – where a little divine intervention could really help!

Dementia is GONE! I rejoiced – realizing that thought Mom is gone from this earth now physically, she’s present in this realm still in a new way, and that new presence does NOT have dementia! We lost her in some ways many years ago. Now we have her back, and what’s GONE is the dementia and confusion and lost memories together.

Concert dedication/duet–found a pic of a smiling Mom reveling in the smiling – whole-face joy, actually—of her baby about 6 months old – guess that OOPS baby was certainly enjoyed and loved. Printed off that picture and look at it several times a day and shed some tears and give thanks for that mama, and the accident/oops and, as she described it years later: “medical technology not working and God having other plans!”

Didn’t try to carry on as if nothing was wrong. Asked for help. Let my soul grieve when it needed to. This is not a sprint but a marathon. I told everyone I knew who still has their mom here to cherish them every day and be prepared for *this* grief to be different.



Music! Started to plan the Celebration of Life with my siblings and uncle. Looked for music that we could all sing together for in both parents’ memory. Gathered with friends here locally to jam and sing poignant songs about passing on to the next life.

Put my heart and soul into a project – a specific memorial –very healing and tangible.

Today, we come to the Table to fill our hearts and souls with Christ's presence in communion together. Then, we have the chance to smooth out the road for countless families around the world through the Heifer Gift Market -- nothing soothes and smoothes life for a struggling family like having animals to raise and be nourished from.

CROWDSOURCE: How do you find the rough roads soothed and smoothed in your life? How do you "make the road smooth" for others? Gotta good story of "soothing and smoothing"?

Copious amounts of hot tea. Drunk alone or with another.

Compassionate listening  

Hugs

Music, friends, humor....Friends who can help me laugh at the worst of times (and they always know just how to hit my funny bone!) When I've been at my lowest, it was my friends who smoothed the rough edges. They were just there, reminding me that I'm ...

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Nancy A Miller I try to be available when others need a service I can provide, usually food. One Christmas time,

several years back, I baked a pie just because I felt like it. I had no need of it for any family gatherings or anything. I spent Christmas Eve away from home, and when I arrived home, I had a phone message from a friend. She was asking if I had any desserts and/or entrees in the freezer. Her family was having a low-key Christmas because her mother had just died, but she wanted a nice dessert. I was able to tell her I had a fresh pie and a frozen casserole, and delivered them on Christmas morning. God must have told me to bake that pie.

As the mother, grandmother and great grandmother of 22 people, I am often called upon to try and smooth things for them. Mostly, I listen and offer advice if I know they want it. (Sometimes, one of my daughters calls if she is Upset just to hear my voice".)

Try to be positive always. Offer decent solutions....[See](#)



Tanya Apel Pot roast and mashed potatoes. When someone is in a situation where meals help to smooth the rough place, I take pot roast and mashed potatoes.

Manage

Love · Reply · 17h



B.v. Queen Cookies are my blessing for others, cards with a positive note that I am thinking of them. Plus, I fix meals unexpectedly for various families. God shows me where these things go and to whom.

PEACE IN THE WORLD BEGINS WITH YOU

by Paul Bane (a message from Spirit)

If you want peace in the world, you must have peace in your heart that is not of this world. Peace in the world begins with you by how well you love others. It is my loving presence in the stillness of your heart that produces that kind of peace in your life.

When you love me with all your heart, mind, strength and soul, you discover how to love your neighbor and develop a deep appreciation and love for yourself. When you experience intimate communion with me, you become aware you are created in my image like your brothers and sisters around the world who are just like you.

(Contemplation: Seeing the World through God's Eyes)

The awareness to love your neighbor is a result of loving yourself through my grace. To hate your neighbor is to hate yourself. Let my love fill your heart and in your mind contemplate my love encompassing all humanity. Hear my words as I have loved you-you love others. And because I first loved you-you now know the essence of my sacrificial love. As I follow the Father's direction, you will love others too as you follow in my steps.

I came to the world to care for everyone like yourself to help them overcome the same fears you have and learn how to love one another.

I encourage you to let go of your divisive thoughts and emotions and have a willingness to forgive and let go of the bitterness, anger, resentment and seek reconciliation first with me and then with others. When you discover inner peace in your soul, you can be at peace with those around you.

Seek my never-ending love for you, and I will supply you all the love you need to practice loving your neighbor and the humility

to love yourself. Remember peace in the world begins with you. **Who is it today that needs the peace I offer in your world today?**

Scripture:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Matthew 5:9 NIV

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.... 1 John 4:19-21 NIV