

**Making Crooked Paths Straight**  
**Luke 3:1-6**  
**December 5, 2021**

Jimmy had trouble pronouncing the letter “R” and because of this his teacher gave him a sentence to practice at home.

**Robert gave Richard a rap in the rib for roasting the rabbit so rare.**

The next day Jimmy came back to school and this is what he said.

**Bob gave Dick a poke in the side for not cooking the bunny enough.**

So what did Jimmy do? He avoided the letter R. There a lot of people today to include Christian believers who go to great lengths to avoid the “R” word which is repentance.

In this season of Advent, which means “coming or arrival”, this is the time when we are to reflect on our spiritual journey, to make sure we are going in the right direction.

What I would like to do this morning is to relook at the message of John the Baptist with the “R” word or repentance as our main focus.

My text is Luke 3:1-3. **In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—<sup>2</sup> during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for**

**the forgiveness of sins. May God grant you understanding of his word. Thanks be to God.**

Every year in the second week of Advent, we are reintroduced to one of the most colorful persons in the entire Bible. John the Baptist, an ascetic type of prophets who was most comfortable in the desert. It was here in the solitude of this barren and quiet place that he heard the voice of the Lord. Which said, **“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled in and the rough ways made smooth.”** It is usually away from the hustle and bustle of life, in those places of silence where we hear the voice of the Lord. Courtesy of the US Army, I had spent time in the desert, and spiritually speaking it was one of the best times of communion I ever had with God.

Now back to John the Baptist. For those who went out to see him in the desert, they understood when he said **making paths straight, rough ways smooth and valley’s filled in.** In ancient times, when a king was about to visit a city, he would send a messenger who would notify city leaders that their leader was about to come for a visit.

And was then and there that they would prepare for his arrival. The first thing they did was to fix the road where the king and his entourage were to travel on. It meant that they would “fill in holes” and “smooth out rough spots”. They would eliminate excessive curves and make them straight.

When John the Baptist had spoken those words from Isaiah, he had taken the ancient practice of road repair and applied it to the prophecy of the Messiah where everyone was to prepare their hearts for the coming of the Lord.

In other words, to remove those things such as lack of faith, unbelief, doubt. And when we begin to live in the right way it is like we turn the crooked paths into straight one.

But John's message of repentance goes a step further and it means to change, or turn around. In other words, it is a call for us to be intentional in the way we include God in our lives.

In 1949, Evangelist Billy Graham held a series of revival meetings in Los Angeles that lasted 8 weeks. One person who was greatly influenced by the services was the notorious gangster by the name of Mickey Cohen. Mickey was much like Al Capone in the sense that he handled over a half a million dollars a day from his organized crime activities. And because Mickey loved to be around celebrities and liked Billy Graham's sermon style, the crusade drew him like magnet. And in time Mickey decided he wanted to become a Christian.

As you could imagine, the news of Mickey's conversion had become an overnight sensation. But nothing in Mickey's life had changed. He continued to lead the life of a gangster. When the crusade staff confronted Mickey about this disconnect between his relationship with God and his extra curricula activities. The gangster scolded them and said: "You did not tell me that I would have to give up my work. You didn't tell me I would have to give up my friends."

You see, Mickey had seen certain actors, actresses; singers; politicians and sports heroes sit night after night on the platform with Billy Graham under the big circus tent. Those celebrities were the ones who had publicly proclaimed their Christian faith. So Mickey figured he could be a Christian gangster and wanted to be part of the action.

Many of the people who came to John the Baptist came in response to his message of repentance. That is to change the direction in which they were going and as proof of that changed life, they were baptized into water.

Repentance is like the U turn sign we see on the road. It is the living proof that our lives have been touched by the mercy of God. If I could use a modern term, it would be like hitting a spiritual reset button.

For those who have invited Christ into their lives, but their lives have not been changed, then perhaps they need to take another look at the R word. Mickey Cohen thought he could be a Christian gangster and continue his activities of money laundering, drug running, gambling, racketeering, prostitution, paying off bribes. But the Kingdom of God doesn't work that way.

I have learned early on in my faith, that for Christ to live in my heart, he has to be Lord of all my life. Which meant I had to "repent" or realign my life and do those things that would please him. Hopefully when we come to church, it is like we have our spiritual batteries recharged or hit the spiritual reset button.

As a pastor, I occasionally sit in on the AA meetings that are held in the basement of our church and I'll often sit in wonder as those men and women speak of how they turned to God, stopped drinking or got off drugs, finding a sponsor and going to meetings. All of things are like a form of repentance. It is filling in the valley, smoothing out the rough edges and taking the straight paths.

Regret and remorse is being sorry but repentance is going a step further. Repentance comes from the Greek word-metanoia. Meta=change. Noia=mind. It is a change of mind and heart.

An example of this would be the time when Governor Patrick Neff of Texas, had gone to speak to a group of assembled convicts at a state penitentiary. After his speech, he said that he would talk to any man if they wanted to speak with him about their case.

There was a large group of men remained, many of them were life-termers. One by one, each told the governor that he was there due to a frame up, some injustice, a judicial blunder and one wanted to be freed. Finally, there was a man who said, "Mr. Governor, I just want to say that I am guilty. I did what they sent me here for, but I believe I have paid for it. If I were granted the right to go out, I would do everything I could to be a good citizen and prove myself worthy of your mercy.

This man was the one the governor pardoned. That is repentance. It is not making excuses and feeling sorry for what we have done, but going the extra step.

I have two additional scriptures:

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Proverbs 28:13 Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

Here are some thought provoking quotes.

- Repentance does not mean anything if you keep doing what you are sorry for.
- True repentance is about transformation, not torture or torment. Dieter Uchdorf.
- True repentance is seen not heard.

John's message is an invitation for all of us to do some type of spiritual reflection. To take stock of our souls. In my opening, I

spoke of Jimmy who avoided the R's, but in the kingdom of God, we cannot avoid the R word. It is a way to help us get back to harmony and balance. Repentance is a way to rethink and redo.

May we have the courage to look at our lives and have the strength to change our ways that are not pleasant in His eyes.