**Sermon Luke 3:1-6 – 5/12/21**

Videolink: <https://youtu.be/BFgj2bdMXKM>

Have you ever taken notice of the scale of the work that goes into building new highways? The building of the Geelong bypass sticks in my mind. When I read today’s Gospel and hear the words, *“every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth”* Luke 3:5. I can’t help but think of that freeway, and the mountains of earthworks, the big machinery, the thousands of hours, and the billions of dollars that it took to build.

What I remember most is how much travel time was saved once it was completed and the joy of driving on double and mostly triple lane freeway all the way to Melbourne.

Straightening crooked roads and making rough roads smooth is a big project, yet today we hear that God called one mere human being for just such a task.

You may expect that God would choose someone with influence and power. At the time there was an abundance of powerful people God could have chosen. Everyone from Tiberius Caesar the emperor and supreme ruler of the Roman Empire, to the rulers of Palestine and even the high-priests Annas and Caiaphas.

God didn’t choose any of these powerful people, instead, God chose the little-known son of an ordinary priest. A man who lived a rather alternative lifestyle out in the wilderness, wearing clothes made of camel’s hair and eating locusts and wild honey, the man we know as John the Baptist. God called this one person to the massive task of making crooked roads straight and rough ways smooth.

Of course, highway construction is a metaphor. John wasn’t called to literally build a road. John was called to prepare human hearts for the Lord. To build a highway directly to human hearts and souls. To remove the obstacles in people’s hearts that would stop them from listening to Jesus when he came.

There is a collective name for these obstacles and the name is sin. At the root of all sin is having faith in anything but God. Placing all your trust and faith in money and possession. Placing all your trust in yourself and your skills and abilities. Placing all your trust in your personal relationships or anything or anyone else other than God. John the Baptist’s job was to make people aware of their sin and their need to have their sin removed. To reveal to the people their need for forgiveness and the source of that forgiveness, namely God.

John didn’t use construction machinery to do his work, instead, he used something more powerful than any machine an army of workers. John used God’s Word. Using God’s Word, John pointed out people’s sins and lead them to repentance. The amazing thing is that through God’s Word, John accomplished his task and thousands of people’s hearts were changed as they repented of their sins and turned in faith toward God.

John Baptised those who repented in the Jordon as a symbol of their sins being washed away. In the process, John prepared those people for the coming of the Lord Jesus into their lives and their hearts. He prepared those people for adoption by God the Father through another baptism, this time into the name of the triune God.

It is amazing that God should call a mere human being to prepare the way for the Lord. Surely Jesus was more than capable of preparing his own way for people to listen to him and receive faith in him. Yet that is not the way God has chosen to prepare people for the Lord. Throughout history, God has called ordinary human beings to prepare his people. That is the means God has chosen to bring his Word to people and to prepare human hearts for faith in Christ.

The only way people can call on the name of the Lord to be saved is if they believe and the only way people can believe in Christ is if they have heard the good news and the only way they can hear the good news is if someone is called and sent. As Paul says, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.” Romans 10:15.

This week as I was travelling on the roads around the city of Adelaide, I noticed how many road-works there are. It seems that no sooner has a road been built or repaired and the surface starts to break down. I noticed a number of roads have visible cracks and areas where the surface is breaking up. Very soon after being built most roads need maintenance. Without regular maintenance, they would soon become bumpy, filled with potholes and eventually impassable.

In the same way, human hearts also need regular maintenance and for this too, God’s has called people to preach the Word of God so that God’s Baptised children can continue to have the highway to their hearts cleared for the coming of the Lord. Through regular preaching of God’s Word and administration of the sacraments, those called by God continue to bring God’s people to repentance and forgiveness. They also help God’s people to grow in knowledge and insight so that they will always be prepared when Jesus comes.

John the Baptist was called to preach repentance and forgiveness to prepare the way for the Lord in the hearts of those who heard him. Today God still calls people of faith from many different backgrounds, with different personalities, different gifts, and talents to preach repentance and forgiveness to prepare the way for the Lord.

Today we give thanks to God for one of his called and ordained servants, John Henderson. We thank God for the blessings he has brought to the many people John’s ministry has touched, including his ministry as Bishop of the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand. We thank God for continuing to call people from all walks of life to prepare the way for the Lord to people’s hearts. We also thank God and trust that through the Holy Spirit, those that are being called will answer God’s call and that through them many more can continue to have their hearts prepared for the Lord.

**Amen**