

A Level Playing Field

December 6, 2009

(Advent 2 – Year C)

Luke 3: 1-6

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

A few years after Susan and I were married, we bought our first house. We built a brand new home in a brand new subdivision in the suburbs, in Katy, Texas.

It was a lot of fun for us watch our new house go from being just a bunch of floor plans, to watching the concrete foundation be poured, to seeing the timbers and the roof go up.

When we moved into our brand new house, we were the last house on our newly constructed street.

Yet soon after we moved in, the land just beyond our house began to be developed, as well.

Day after day, we watched giant dump trucks go past our house to deliver dirt to the vacant land beyond our house.

This dirt started out as a pile, then the dirt grew into a mound, then it grew into a hill, then it grew into a small mountain.

Then, one day, large tractors began to chip away at this mountain of dirt and haul it away.

The dirt was spread out over the vacant land to fill in gullies and ditches.

The dirt was spread out to smooth over the rough places in the land.

Finally, after days of spreading out the mountain of dirt, the land was leveled.

As our subdivision grew, the land was leveled to build new houses, houses with flat and level foundations.

As our subdivision grew, every valley was filled, every mountain and hill was made low, and the rough ways were made smooth, to create a level field.

In the wilderness, John the Baptist proclaims a message of creating a level playing field.

John the Baptist is “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

Prepare the way of the Lord...

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low.
The crooked shall be made straight and the rough ways made smooth;
And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

John the Baptist does not use a dump truck or a tractor to create a level playing field.

Yet John the Baptist uses his strong voice, a voice crying out in the wilderness, to proclaim a revolutionary message.

John the Baptist’s revolutionary message is the message that God lifts up those who are in valleys.

And God brings down those on lofty mountains and hills.

And John the Baptist proclaims this revolutionary message

So that all of us will see each other as God sees us, as people on a level playing field.

Just like the mountain of dirt that was used to level the ground in our new subdivision, John the Baptist proclaims a message that the mountains and hills of this life shall be made low.

We have witnessed a perfect example of this in this last week as we have learned that the mountain of the game of golf, Tiger Woods, is a real human being, just like the rest of us.

Just because someone can make millions of dollars by swinging a golf club, that does not mean that they are any greater than any other person.

And this same message of mountains and hills being brought low echoes throughout the characters in God’s holy Scriptures.

The great King David is brought low after he sleeps with Bathsheba, revealing David to be a man with all the temptations and passions of any man.

The high and mighty queen Jezebel is brought low after she schemes and connives her way to the top, revealing Jezebel to be as calculating and deceitful as anyone.

The rich young ruler in the Gospels is brought low after Jesus requests that he give away everything to the poor, revealing that the rich young ruler is just as greedy as any person.

From King David to Queen Jezebel to the rich young ruler,
From Richard Nixon to Kate Gosselin to Tiger Woods,

The mountains and hills are made low, proclaiming God's revolutionary message that we are all on a level playing field.

Yet the revolutionary message of John the Baptist does not stop with the mountains and hills being brought low.

The voice in the wilderness also proclaims that the valleys shall be filled and the rough places made smooth.

When I served at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in northwest Houston, a member of the vestry there was the director of an Episcopal mission in downtown Houston called Lord of the Streets.

Lord of the Streets is actually an Episcopal Church made up of mainly homeless people, people who live every day in the valley of life.

The director of Lord of the Streets invited me to come one day to the Bible study that they hold at Lord of the Streets every day at noon.

At the Bible study, I sat in a circle with about 20 people.

Many of the people in this circle had not showered or bathed in days.

Many of them carried all of their worldly possessions in a paper bag.

However, we opened up the Scriptures and we all shared about how God was working in our life.

I was amazed as these men and women told story after story about how God was filling their life and providing for their needs.

These people who live on the streets grinned from ear to ear as they shared stories about how God was making their rough places a bit smoother for them.

These homeless people shared how the Lord of the Streets was filling their valleys.

And this same revolutionary message of valleys being filled and rough places being made smooth echoes throughout the characters in God's holy Scriptures.

In the Old Testament, the hungry widow of Zarephath is fed by the prophet Elijah.

The blind man on the road to Jericho receives his sight from Jesus.

The prostitute is allowed to wash Jesus' feet with her tears and dry them with her hair.

From widows to blind men to prostitutes,

From the uninsured to the mentally ill to the homeless men and women who live on the streets,
Every valley shall be filled, proclaiming God's revolutionary message that we are all on a level playing field.

When Mary, the mother of Jesus, hears the message that she is pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit,
She also proclaims the revolutionary message of a level playing field of God, where all people are equal.

In her song called the Magnificat, Mary cries out:
"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.
[For] he has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
And has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
And the rich he has sent away empty."

This morning, on this Second Sunday of Advent, we join our voices with Isaiah and Baruch and Mary and John the Baptist.

We join our voices with those who cry out in the wilderness, with the good news that we are all people are equal, that all people are on a level playing field.

So if you are on your high horse, if you think you are better than other folks, those tractors are going to bring your mountain toppling down.
And if you are down and out, if you are in the valley, then we promise to get out our shovels and fill you with food and clean water and adequate health care and a warm bed and with love.

You see, brothers and sisters,
There is a voice, a voice crying out in the wilderness:
Everyone is equal.
Everyone is loved.

AMEN.

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