

Text: Mark 1:1-8 (Advent 2, Series B, December 10, 2017)

Theme: Life in Construction

Virtue (basic truth): John the Baptist preached repentance to prepare the Lord's way.

Malady (our problem): Sinful hearts are bouldered with obstacles cluttering the Lord's way.

Telic Note (goal): By means of this sermon, the Spirit of Grace levels our hearts with his Law and smooths our hearts with the Gospel to be ready to receive our dear Jesus.

Propositional Statement (aim): Dealing with traffic construction is tough . . . and, downright frustrating. But, when the construction is done, it's worth it! Spiritually, our lives are always in construction and always needing construction. Thankfully, the power of God's Word works on our hearts to prepare a way for the Lord – and that's *life in construction!*

Specific Law in Text: "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him" (Mk. 1:2).

Specific Gospel in Text: "he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 1:8).

Doctrinal Thought: the blessing of forgiveness is very much connected to baptism!

Sanctification Thought: *"Living Lord, my heart is so cluttered with obstacles and frustrations and things that get in your way. But, prepare my heart, Lord Jesus! And continue to level my pride and remove my sin that, with a glad heart and joyous conscience, I might receive you. In the power of baptism, dear Savior, strengthen me to turn from sin and live for you. In your name I pray. Amen!"*

Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

² It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" – ³ "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

⁴ And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Mark's Gospel is quick, powerful and concise – just like God's grace is to sinners as he still assures each of us that his grace, mercy, peace, and forgiveness are ours in his dear Son. Amen!

If it sounds like I'm ready for it to be done, it's because I am. As a caveat, I gladly admit the project *thinks Boulder* and, when it is done, will be a wonderful benefit to bike paths, pedestrian crossings, and flood mitigation for years to come. But, I'm ready for the 28th Street construction to be done. Delays and detours haven't been horrendous. Lane changes and cone configurations aren't confusing – anymore. But, a year-plus of the *same* work on the *same* intersection, year-plus on one multi-use path tunneled under 28th Street and . . . ***life in construction*** is getting old.

Won't pretend to know the traffic patterns where you live or the commuter improvements in progress that affect your transportation progress; but you get it. Construction – though necessary, important, beneficial, and a blessing down the being-built road – isn't always easy to deal with. And, often, ***life in construction***, consternates, aggravates, and annoys – especially when and where the project is prolonged or inconvenience dominates or delays our daily routine.

Illustration out there, the ***life in construction*** frustration applies well past our daily commute; and you already know that. Relationally, avenues of life endure frustrated delays and frantic detours. Occupationally, angst reconfigures as work-life doesn't progress the way we think it should. Emotionally, struggles jar us to a halt or jam us into uncomfortable zones! And, I know it's cliché, road of life is filled with potholes that only misalign. Happens congregationally, too.

Here's my point: whether the delay is minimal or detour massive, ***life in construction*** will have banes before blessings. We expect it. And that's why it's so unnatural for us to recognize that ***life in construction*** is the advent awareness our hearts need to be Savior-ready. Abrupt lane change to preferred line of thought, but intriguingly and inspiredly, it's also both the merciful insight and masterful encouragement the Spirit of Grace works with his powerful Word. And, as the Lord's Day draws, it's also the encouragement we *want* to see and *need* to see – daily.

Clear as any place in the Spirit Inspired, Mark's Gospel (1:1-8) convey it. But, so we don't think the advent admonition is an isolated incident, Mark connects two Old Testament prophets who cried the same cry. Malachi – 500 years before Christ – and Isaiah – 700 years before Christ – agree on the importance: Messiah is making his way, and so is the messenger who will prepare that way. Live and endure ***life in construction*** so that nothing stops or hinders the Good News.

We'll get to that application soon enough, but, let's see the forerunner, first. Glance again at the second half of those verses – Mark 1:4-8; and our Sunday schoolers will help us with this. Kids:

- What was the name of the man you learned about today? *John the Baptist*
- What kind of clothes did he wear? *Camel's hair and a leather belt* – which was an uncomfortable and unstylish prophet's garb – Elijah wore the same (II Kings 1:8).

- What kind of food did he eat? *Locusts and wild honey*
- What was his message? *Repent and be baptized!*

Fabulous! John the Baptist, the Messiah's messenger and the Christ's forerunner was a simple man with simple dress and simple diet and a marvelous message; a blue collar man with a golden message; a lower-class man with a first-class sermon! In every aspect, John lived a ***life in construction*** as he stood there pointing out and preparing hearts for the One greater than he.

Stay captivated by the sights of the construction worker, but make sure to hear his construction cry. In line with his commission, he taught all people need a Savior and pointed out Jesus as that Savior of all. He existed as an uncompromising preacher of repentance from sin, of forgiveness in the Savior. *"John not only denounced sin; he also announced the forgiveness of sins. The Baptist's message of repentance was one of sin and grace, law and gospel"* (Wendland, 19).

Elegant to whom that message was made clear and for whom that message was meant. Religious culture then understood the need to be ceremonially set apart; and, already by John's time, baptizing Gentiles did just that, it *"marked their full acceptance into the community of God's chosen people"* (LSB Footnote). But the messenger's message isn't just for those born outside the chosen family; he preached and proclaimed a baptism for . . . all . . . because all, by nature, were born outside of the family! Uncompromisingly, the Baptist preached that truth to Jews and Gentiles, Pharisees and prostitutes, Sadducees and the socially secure. Recognize sin! Savior is coming! Repent from sin! Savior is near! Be baptized for the forgiveness of sin! Savior is at hand! And, *"confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River"* (Mark 1:5).

Friends, that's absolutely the construction sign we still need to hear, herald, and hold on still-sinful hearts. To Christians and non, recognize sin! To the proud and poor, the Savior is near! To the sin-sick and sinfully-secure, repent! To the guilt-ridden and sin-gut-rotten, revel in our baptism that forgives sins! Live ***life in construction*** as God's Law daily uproots sin and bulldozes pride; as it levels arrogance and bores through your hard heart. Be done with sin!

God's Law is hard to hear; but we need it. But even as the news of our own sin breaks our own hearts, let's recognize the construction process isn't just demolition and destruction; by definition, it also builds up and puts together for a beautiful benefit. John got it; John proclaimed it. And, as the fulfillment of Malachi's message and Isaiah's inspiration, he understood the need for and the beautiful blessing ours in a ***life in construction***. Look again: *"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way - a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the LORD, make straight paths for him'"* (Mark 1:2-3).

Sometimes road construction seems so unnecessary – or, at least the way they get about it seems unnecessary. Why all the engineers and earth-movers? Who drew up the plans and projections?

What's the non-rush and what's their delay? Seems simple: blow it up, move it out! But they take their time because the job is serious and it's important to do it right, safely and well.

Sinful side of us wants to approach our spiritual construction, that way, too. I know I need work. I know my life isn't right. I know I've sinned and I still sin; I know I've messed up and I still do. So why doesn't God just blow it up, move it out and call it good? Why is the process so hard?!

Simple answer: because, in love undeserved, he's building us up into something beautiful. Better said: he's building our hearts to properly receive someone beautiful – our Savior, our King, our God, our Lord! In love undeserved, *life in construction* daily demolishes our sin – so stubborn to fall – and gladly hears his Word. As sin boulders are blasted, his forgiveness gospel has the smooth road it needs. As the pride roots are dug out, his peace gospel finds level ground. As the mistake-walls are rubble, his promise gospel builds us up so we see the One to whom John pointed, the One greater than he who came for . . . we!

Quickly: women, what's the most annoying thing men do when driving in a construction zone?

Has to be! Has to be the fact that male inclination is to navigate its own way. Suggested detour? I know a quicker one. Cone configuration? I know a smarter one. Wait for the signal and sign? Nah; my way is so much more sensible way than how the engineers have it drawn up. Why endure inconvenience when I can avoid the chaos?

Friends, with *life in construction* waiting for our Savior, there's a massive temptation to do the same. Why wait in the prescribed pattern, when we can just do our own thing?! But that's not preparing the way. Why level the road like it's required, when I can continue as is unharmed on this side of eternity? But that's not at all making straight the path. Why take the detour when I can perceive just fine what's safe enough for me and sort of safe for everyone else? Don't they know, doesn't Jesus know, that I have things to do, places to be, and people to see?!

Christians, why wait? Why endure a *life in construction*? Why let God's Word level our sin and make straight the path? It's hard. It's difficult. It's uneasy. It's chaotic. How do we know it's worth it? Because construction always builds for the better. And our *life in construction* always comes back, dear friends, to the One for whom we wait. It always fixes our focus on the glad truth that, the One for whom we wait, is Jesus Christ – our Savior Messiah (Mk. 1:1) The One for whom we wait is the Son of God, our Comfort and our Redeemer. He's the Lord (Mk. 1:3) – the King of kings and God of gods. And he's coming to take us home! God keep your *life in construction* until you receive the heaven he's built!

Amen!