**2 Advent, December 9, 2012, Luke 3:1-6, The Rev. Mary S. Trainor**

All of us have played board, video, or computer games in our lives. They are fun, aren't they? Think about a particular type of game now, like the Playstation game, "Road Trip Adventure" a driving game that takes you up and down twisting mountain roads with steep drop offs, zoom, zoom, whoa, I'm getting dizzy! Or "Chutes and Ladders," where your travel might be fun, because you may skip ahead, or risky because you may slide way down. You got the picture. Let's say you have been playing "Chutes and Ladders" for a while, and you are feeling pretty good about yourself having just climbed the longest ladder. You are way ahead of the other players! Then, oh dear, you find your playing piece lands at the top of the longest chute and *zip*, you slide back down to near the beginning of the game. Your success becomes defeat. Aren't our lives like this sometimes too? These games are often crooked journeys-- with highs and lows, valleys and peaks, and if you map out our lives, you would find all of that too. Journey is a metaphor for life.

Today's scriptures are about journey: our journey in life and Jesus' journey here on earth -- and how they are interconnected. In the Old Testament reading by John the Baptist's grandfather, Baruch, we learned about God making, "***the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground."*** And in Luke's Gospel we heard, ***"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight. 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"***  These journeys are all about the journey preparing for Christ. As the Gospel says, to "***see the salvation of God***" which is the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist, the wild desert-dweller, was sent by God to prepare the people for Jesus' coming by calling on the people to repent. We study him now because we are in the season of Advent, when we prepare for the coming of Jesus. Back in the day of John the Baptist, thousands of people from lands far and near came to hear him, "***the voice of one crying out in the wilderness."*** You see, people then were longing for the Messiah. John the Baptist was speaking the truth they longed to hear. People came forward to repent after hearing John speak of the need to prepare for the Messiah, who was soon to be in their midst. The baptism of repentance which John the Baptist preaches is not the same kind of baptism which Jesus brought and is a sacrament in our church. John the Baptist's baptism of repentance was their way of preparing for the Messiah's coming; it was a ritual cleansing done after a person had decided to turn away from sin and a toward God. When one repents the obstacles are removed so that Christ has full access. Proverbs 3: 6 captures this, "***in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your path straight."*** Making the path straight is not about getting rid of the beauty of river valleys and mountain tops it is about getting ready for Jesus! It is about:

- turning away from what takes you away from God,

- making sense of your life and your reason for being here,

- giving you knowledge that you are a person who matters,

- taking the pain away from past troubles, and lifting you up to the promise.

I don't know Anne personally, but I know her story. She was a woman in her 30s, troubled, an alcoholic single mother who was very alone - lost, lonely, discouraged, hungry. Her journey had been a long and hard one, with a few ups and lots of twists and downs - in fact so many that she was not only lost, but way way down below where she even thought that it was possible for a life journey to go. Off the lower part of the board on "Chutes and Ladders." One day, she happened upon an Episcopal Church and she went in - having no place else she was to be at the time, she thought she would take the risk to check it out. Inside, starting that day, her crooked life journey that was so messed up began to straighten and flatten. Jesus straightened the path for Anne and He can do it for you. From then on, Ann's life purpose became clear and she began writing for the glory of God, and has sold millions of books. I am speaking about Anne Lamott, the author of six best seller books. Her 2012 book is called, "Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers."

Maybe your life journey is not as crazy as Anne Lamott's; maybe it is up and down because of financial or relationship challenges, or maybe you are just too busy, or preoccupied with stress, fear, or worry. But maybe you are like others in our culture, looking to God only as a last resort. I spoke to a fellow priest this week who is frustrated because, "**people treat Jesus like a hobby - something to fit in only if you don't have something better to do**." Whew! How can Christ be born in our hearts if we don't have time for Him, if we fit Him in haphazardly between other stuff?

Wherever your journey is, it needs more of Jesus. Whether or not you know it, you are longing for more of Jesus. The Good News is that God is faithful; He provides the gas in your engine for your life journey to straighten. And when you repent, when you change direction and do more of something (prayer), and doing less of something else, you will experience inner **peace** no matter what is going on in your life.

Today, the 2nd Sunday of Advent, is the Sunday of peace. A few minutes ago, we prayed: "**A Candle is burning, a candle of peace... for Jesus is coming to show us the way; a message of peace humbly laid in the hay."** And, when that peace enters into our lives, we overflow with joy and love....just like Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, did. In place of the Psalm today, we read together the Song of Zechariah. Here Zechariah was celebrating because of Jesus being born in his heart and our hearts. He said (and we read), ***"the dawn from on high shall break upon us....and our feet will be guided into the way of peace."*** Yes!

Let us pray the collect (prayer for the day) found on the front of your bulletin insert: **Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**