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Peace, Sun Prairie
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Advent 2

Luke 3:1-6

REAL REDEEMER, REAL REPENTANCE

One word to describe the Christian faith is not symbolic, not traditional, but real.

The portion of God's Word we are considering today from Luke chapter 3 sets forth this premise plainly. As we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Savior this Advent season let's remember that the Redeemer for whom we are waiting is a real redeemer and the repentance He requires of us is real repentance.

The Gospel writer Luke was a doctor, highly educated – we can tell by the style of Greek he wrote. He was also a researcher driven to get all the facts straight. We can be grateful to the Holy Spirit for using him to give us a thorough and accurate account of the redemption story. Listen to how Luke opened his Gospel: *Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*

First, notice how out in the open Luke is about this. Unlike the Koran or the Book of Mormon which were produced by a single individual in vague and secretive circumstances with no witnesses to corroborate, the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus were widely known. There were many witnesses. And Luke's investigation of it was widely known. There was nothing secretive about him producing his findings in this sacred book of the Bible. If he had gotten anything wrong in his Gospel, there were plenty of people who could have corrected the record.

That brings us to the way chapter three opens. Notice how meticulously Luke establishes the historical context. *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 – during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.*

Did you ever wonder why the unbelieving Gentile, Pontius Pilate, is mentioned in the most sacred summary of our Christian faith – the Apostles Creed? The Creed says, "He suffered under Pontius Pilate." Why mention a local Roman governor in a statement of faith? Because, and note this well, the Christian faith is not a philosophy, a tradition, a worldview, a theory, a

set of rules or values, a system of dogma, an aspirational motif or even a mere belief. The Christian faith is rooted in historical fact. It can be pinpointed to a time, to a name in history, the name Pontius Pilate. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is an actual happening. He is a real Redeemer, who really lived here on earth, who really lives even now – God from eternity who became a man in time.

The content of our Christian faith is the ramifications of those real events. Because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead we trust that we really are redeemed, redeemed from sin, from death, from the devil and from hell – redeemed to heaven. A real heaven. This is not a metaphor. It is not symbolic. The Redeemer is real. Our redemption is real.

We have a God who deals in the real. Therefore when He prepares us for this real Redeemer, He calls us to real repentance. That is the purpose for which he appointed John the Baptizer to preach – to make a people ready for Jesus by calling them to repentance.

When the Gospel-writer Luke describes John's ministry here in chapter three, he quotes Isaiah the prophet. By the Holy Spirit's direction, the prophet Isaiah miraculously foretold the ministry of John the Baptizer some 700 years earlier before it happened.

Now, I made a major point of saying that Jesus is a real redeemer and that God deals in the real. That said, God also makes use of a variety of styles of literature in the Bible to communicate to us the reality of our salvation. That doesn't make God's truths any less real or less concrete. We just have a God who delights to tell it to us in so many ways so as to reach as many people as possible so that we also may delight in it. The style of writing that God employs through Isaiah the prophet is a type of poetry – filled with picturesque descriptions of very real spiritual truths.

Luke wrote in chapter 3, *John went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation.'"*

It sounds like a road crew with bulldozers and heavy machinery getting the landscape ready for a new highway. God wants to pave a highway to your heart to make it ready for Jesus. But to do that, He needs to plough through all the defenses, all the obstacles and roadblocks you and I throw up. You see, Jesus came to take away our sin, but you and I don't like admitting that we have any real sins that need taking away. We naturally resist any real repentance for our guilt. We throw up excuses and rationalizations and avoidance and general defiance.

If you go on to read John's preaching in Luke 3, you'll find that he held nothing back. He blasted the crowds for very specific sins – not sharing food, dishonesty in taxes, false

accusations. It's not unlike our own study of the Ten Commandments for the past several weeks in Sunday Bible Class – how we've encountered specific sins – living together before marriage, ignoring the speed limit, complaining about the employer, neglecting to worship, harboring a superstition, belittling someone with your jokes, disrespecting your parents. The question is have we, do we, really repent of these things and seek Christ's forgiveness? Or do we just sort of gloss over them assuming that time will make it all go away or God will just sort of let it go and no real change will be necessary?

The greatest dishonor you can do to Christ is not to repent, that is not to acknowledge your very real need for His redeeming work. The greatest honor you can do Christ is to turn to Him for His very real forgiveness – the very thing He suffered and died to provide for you.

He even provides very real ways for you to have His forgiveness. John preached and he baptized. Your minister preaches and baptizes. This is how God really delivers Christ's redemption to you. In His holy Supper, Christ gives you His real body and His real blood to fill you with His forgiveness and grace. These things are not symbolic. They do not merely represent. They are real. Our God deals in the real.

As we prepare our hearts for Christ this Advent season, let us rejoice that we have a real Redeemer who has redeemed us from real sins and all the troubles and the sufferings and the doomed outcome that our sins cause us. Let us therefore also meet Him with real repentance, trusting that He will come with His forgiveness to make us clean and new, and that He will then dwell in us through faith. Then as His redeemed people we will dwell with Him in a real heaven for all eternity.