

Luke 3:1-14

More and more I'm hearing people say, "I'm tired of waiting at the Missouri River bridge. I wish they would hurry up and finish with their repairs already!" Maybe you have said the same thing. I know I have. Five months we've endured one-lane traffic, and at times the traffic has been backed up for miles. And for what? So that we will all be able to enjoy a nice, new, four-lane bridge into Washington? No....when they finish, it will be the same bridge as before. It will look the same except for some paint. It will feel the same. It will still shake when semi-trucks go across. The only difference will be the repairs which were made below the surface. It won't even begin to compare to the beautiful, new, wide bridge over at Hermann. But at least we'll be safe. When crossing, we will not need to worry whether or not the bridge will hold up.

Have you ever, in the past five months, waved at the bridge workers as you drove across? If so, then you are the exception. Most drivers put up with the workers. They don't yell angry words at them out their windows, but they don't stop and chat with them either. Everyone is simply wanting to get across before the light turns red. And the bridge workers are not there for conversation. They are there to work. They may, or may not have, nice personalities. It doesn't matter. They are not there to brighten our day with smiles and high-fives. They are there to repair the bridge and make it safe for us.

There is a strong parallel here with John the Baptist. He is the Advent preacher who appears each December. Not just one Sunday, but for two Sundays we sit and endure as he works on the bridge. We're not here for John; we're here for Jesus. We put up with John just like we put up with the workers on the bridge into Washington. We're not impressed by John's appearance. He looks like a bridge worker. He lives out in the elements. He's not a "suit and tie" kind of guy. His hair is unkempt. His clothes need to be washed. He needs a shave. But that's okay. He's here to work on the bridge, not to sit down with us over tea and cookies. I don't want those workers at Washington to look kept and clean. I want to see grease on their hands. I want to know that they know what they're doing; that they are making the bridge safe.

And so with John. He was not sent by God to make us all feel good. He was sent to make repairs on our hearts. His is the voice of repentance. "Prepare the way of the Lord!" is his cry. His message is like all those sign approaching Washington. "Bridge work ahead"..."Slow down"..."Do not enter"..."No right turn." "You brood of vipers," John yelled at the crowds, "Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance! Stop doing that...start doing this." John spoke with authority. He was sent by God.

Just like we need to obey the signs and instructions of those who work on the bridge, so John's message must be obeyed. Those men at Washington are not there for their own pleasure. They have their orders, and they have authority over us. They must be obeyed as they repair our bridge. And so we need to heed John's message to repent. His voice is not heard here in church each December because it's so pleasing to the ear. He is here because he has his orders. God sent him to prepare the way for the Savior. He was sent to make repairs, and oh how our hearts need those repairs!

Do you recall that bridge in Minneapolis a few years ago which collapsed and sent drivers plummeting to their deaths? That's why those bridge workers are in Washington, so that does not happen to us. And that is why we hear John each and every Advent, because we will collapse and perish unless we heed the Law of God and repent of our sinful ways.

What would happen to a driver who ignored the warning signs at the bridge into Washington? Who failed to slow down? Who paid no attention to the red light? Who drove right through the barricades? The same thing would happen to him physically that happens spiritually to men and women every day who ignore the voice and authority of John the Baptist. They wreck their lives. They make a mess of their families. They plunge themselves into ruin, and in the end, they perish.

If you are one who has been speeding through life, not slowing down to hear God's message, not being watchful of the warning signs, but living selfishly and ignoring God's authority and His Advent preacher, then now is the time to repent, for tomorrow your bridge may collapse. Now is the time to start bearing fruits of repentance. If we're repentant people, won't that show in how we live? If we truly love God and believe in Jesus, won't our lives reflect that day after day?

We're never going to be that beautiful new bridge at Hermann. We're just the same old Washington bridge day after day, year after year. We're not going to be shining examples of perfection. We have our bumps, and potholes, and weaknesses. We shake with anger when others run over us with their truckloads of words that hurt and offend us. We're not going to last forever. Our time here is limited.

But through His preacher, God keeps repairing our hearts. His words of law are not easy to hear. We're forced, by them, to see that we are rickety, old, sinful bridges that will never be perfect in this life. But every time God draws you here to His House, He is at work making repairs. You and I will never be beautiful, new, four-lane bridges. We will always be full of sin in every section of our life and heart. But because God's words are at work in you, He will hold you together.

And He holds you together because your Savior is coming. He makes His repairs so that Jesus has a road to travel into your heart and life. We're not here for John; we're here for Jesus. But without John there would be no Jesus. Without the Law we would reject the Gospel. Without repentance there can be no forgiveness. Do you repent? Then God will bear the fruits of that in your life. And even more...here is Christ for you! He is here in your baptism into His death and resurrection. He is here in the bread and wine to keep you strong in the Faith. He is here in His words of pardon and peace. You are forgiven. Your Savior made that certain by His death for you.

Is your life all rickety like an old bridge? Do you wonder if you can make it to the end? Understand this...Christians are not beautiful new bridges; they're weak, sinful, rickety ones--but ones which are forgiven. God will not take you to heaven because He is impressed by you. He will take you to heaven because you, a repentant sinner, are forgiven in Christ Jesus, and this you believe.

Jesus has no desire to travel on beautiful perfect bridges. They're just Pharisees. He travels to your heart which, like mine, is sick with sin and knows it. He comes into your life which, like mine, is a complete mess and needs Him. Through John, God is making His repairs on you, but in Christ He truly hold you up. In Christ you will survive the sleet, and hail, and erosion in life. In Christ you will stand firm to the end.

One day, maybe after we are gone, there will be a wide new bridge into Washington. And one day in heaven we will look like that new bridge. But for now, we are who we are--weak, old, sinful bridges; always under repair; and always, by the grace of God, forgiven in Christ Jesus. Amen.