

## Advent as Wilderness

The Second Sunday of Advent, Year C, RCL. Luke 3:1-6. December 9, 2018. The Episcopal Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance in the Diocese of Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

Advent is a time between promise and fulfilment. A symbol for this is **wilderness**, which in the Bible is a zone between settled, productive land and barren desert. Wilderness is rough country, but it is survivable, and it is a zone where you can draw near to God. Prophets tend to spend some time there. Jesus did, and so did his cousin John the Baptist. As I recently read in an Advent meditation, John the Baptist was rough in every sense of the word: he lived rough in the wilderness, he ate rough (locusts and wild honey), he dressed rough (a garment of camel's hair) and he talked rough ("You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" [Luke 3:7]).

In between promise and fulfilment, the terrain can be rough. The season of Advent reminds us that's where we live, in a sense, all the time. From time to time we feel the urge to mention to God that we could use smoother terrain, thank you very much. And yes, we do have God's promise that the rugged terrain will be smoothed out; we heard that promise again in today's reading from Luke.

But here we are, in the middle of the journey, trying not to wander into the desert on the one hand and not feeling close enough to green grass and flowing streams on the other.

Where, in your life, is the wilderness, the rough terrain, the zone in between the promise of wholeness restored and the fulfilment of that promise? What harsh ground are you walking, what harsh talk are you hearing, what harsh circumstances must you choke down and call nourishment, what harshness surrounds you like a hair shirt you can't shrug off?

John told those who came out to hear him that a greater voice of God than he was coming: not a harsh witness but a real ground-smoother. And Jesus did show up. Now we hear both John and Jesus speaking, through our holy tradition, of both the difficulty of the road and the assurance of the goal. We are journeying toward the God who is approaching us. It doesn't always feel like we are being reborn, but we are. "All flesh shall see the salvation of God." (Luke 3:6, quoting Isaiah 40:5)

Our deepest hope, our profoundest peace, our truest confidence, our brightest joy: these things rest in the promise of the approaching God, the God of Advent, who will not leave us in the wilderness, or leave the wilderness in us, or leave the wilderness as it is, but will restore all things in his divine completeness. Pray, brothers and sisters, for the grace to endure the wilderness and for the restoration of the world through the living presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.