**“Paving over the Wildnerness?”**

A Sermon delivered by Rachel Wildman, Second Sunday of Advent, 2015

Scriptural text: Luke 3:1-6

*In the tender compassion of our God*

*May the dawn from on high* ***break*** *upon us,*

*shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, guide our feet into the way of peace.*

This morning we hear the voice of one crying out in the wilderness…just as this week, like other weeks, we have heard the voices of so many crying out in the wilderness:

Those in San Bernadino and in Colorado Springs…amidst the horror of gun violence, crying out for **safety**

Those in Chicago…amidst new video of police brutality, crying out for **justice**

Those in Paris…amidst crucial world climate talks, crying out for **courage and determination**

Those in Syria…refugees, still crying out for **welcome**

Those here in our own state, our own town…amidst poverty, crying out for the **sustenance** of life, itself, for housing, for food, for living wages, for creative, inspiring classrooms for every child,

Even those in our own congregation, maybe ourselves, our family members…amidst the ups and downs of every day life, crying out for enduring **friendship,** for loved ones we have lost, for respite from illness, for relief from hollowing lonliness.

We are all, every one of us, in ways both personal and collective, crying out in this deep wilderness in which we find ourselves….

It is tempting in December to clear-cut and pave right over this whole deep wilderness and get lost in the shopping malls, boppy Christmas music, and frantic planning, cooking, and wrapping that awaits us when the pavement is dry.

It even seems that John the Baptist, with Isaiah’s words, encourages us to just this sort of clear-cutting—“*every mountain and hill shall be made low*,” he proclaims—“*Every valley filled*.” Tear it down, fill it up, and move on!

But, to pave over the wilderness is to operate under the illusion that we can define the area of the wilderness, control it, and separate ourselves from those who somehow still find themselves in it…miles away. To pave over the wilderness is also to deny God’s existence within it.

In paving, we will knock down the bushes that a family of endangered Golden-winged warblers comes back to each Spring—we will remove the rock that the woman who will invent a cure for aggressive lung cancer comes to every Sunday morning to think—we will roll away the big, rotting log where the boy who would have eventually felt alienated and angry enough to take another’s life meets his very best childhood friend, changing his trajectory forever.

If we are to truly abide the Word of God delivered to John and to us in the wilderness *this* day …we must repent—Repent: to turn towards God.

How can we turn towards God if we pave over the ways in which God’s love is already manifest in *even* this wilderness?

No, these divine spaces within the wilderness need to be preserved so that we may turn to them as we wrestle the brambles, and be reminded with absolute certainty that **God IS WITH US**.

For safety, for welcome, for justice, courage, determination, sustenance, friendship--all the things for which we cry out in this very moment—For these things to become our lived reality, we must wade deep into the wilderness and prune branch by branch.

Some of us must deal with the mountains and hills. We must tear down. Some of us must lament, must shed tears and be willing to face the pain of the losses we have all experienced. Some of us must let those tears and that pain kindle in us the righteous anger that will call us all to account.

Others of us must deal with the valleys. We must fill up. Some of us must hold hope, against all logic. Some of us must love, against all reason to fear.

I like the real ending to the passage from Isaiah that John the Baptist quotes, rather than what we have in the Gospel of Luke…Rather than ending, “*And all flesh shall see the salvation of God*,” Isaiah’s own words proclaim, “*Then the glory of the Lord shall be proclaimed, and all people shall see it together*.” The two are similar, yet for me, Isaiah points much more clearly to the reality that unless every single one of God’s creatures sees the Kingdom in full glory, none of us sees it. The wilderness of one place feeds the wilderness of another--Whether we live in Syria, or Bedford, San Bernadino, or urban Boston. Therefore, we can only bring about heaven on earth together—each of us performing the role to which God has called us, with our own particular life experiences, and our own particular talents and growing edges. Each of us has a part in this Advent preparation.

Who among us will tear down the mountains and hills? Which of you feels called to spend some time lamenting for us, sitting in prayer…mourning one of our daily losses and crying out to our God? Which of you feels called to risk getting so angry or fired up as to take an action, small or large, on behalf of us all?

And who among us will fill up the valleys? Which of you feels called to spend time this Advent season reminding us of those places of light amidst the darkness? Of the reasons we have to hope? Which of you feels called to take time to reach out some way in love to one who is forgotten, hard to love, or even feared?

What can *you* do to prepare the way of the Lord? There *is* something.

Just as it came to John, may the guiding word of God come to each of us, in this, *our* wilderness.

**AMEN**.