

God's infrastructure plan (Luke 3:1-6)

## **Advent is also about our own coming and going, the ways we embody the reconstructive ways of the Lord.**

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In the unorthodox context of a dry jungle, John's baptismal campaign of forgiveness and repentance serves as an antecedent to the love revolution of the Jesus movement.

Before the wilderness lost its voices of resistance and churches succumbed to prophetic laryngitis, John reinvigorated the tradition of the Hebrew prophet against the background of political collusion between Rome and the temple. Luke tracks this vocational summons of John to 29 CE. This was the 15th year of Tiberias, the third year of Governor Pilate, and the 33rd year of Herod Antipas.

"The sort of crimes and even the amount of delinquency that fill the prophets of Israel with dismay do not go beyond that which we regard as normal," writes Abraham Joshua Heschel, "as typical ingredients of social dynamics. To us a single act of injustice—cheating in business, exploitation of the poor—is slight; to the prophets, a disaster. To us injustice is injurious to the welfare of the people; to the prophets it is a deathblow to existence: to us, an episode; to them, a catastrophe, a threat to the world."

John translates this ancient social conscience and consciousness into his time, beckoning us in our own time to cultivate an eye for such devastation and the

temerity to resist it. Hyper-partisanship must succumb to our love of justice and universal belonging.

In a politically gridlocked and morally bereft Washington, something surprising transpired over the summer and fall: Congress managed to pass a bipartisan infrastructure bill that promises a once-in-a-generation investment in workers and commuters—in people. It will create millions of jobs, invigorate our economy for the most vulnerable, ensure that children no longer do homework at Denny's for the wi-fi, and promote safe travel. Jobs, wi-fi, and safety are nonpartisan necessities.

For Advent, God the abolitionist ratifies an infrastructure plan crafted to benefit everyone, particularly those Ida B. Wells-Barnett called the sinned against and Howard Thurman called the disinherited. Our Advent expectation of the in-breaking of the Divine points us toward a nonpartisan campaign to do justice, toward a vision of universal kinship and interdependence.

Luke borrows some infrastructural imagery from Isaiah:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
    make straight paths for him.  
...The crooked roads shall become straight,  
    the rough ways smooth.  
And all people will see God’s salvation.’”

“A voice cries out,” says Isaiah’s version: “‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God’” (40:3). These words first emerge as a message of hope for a trafficked and exploited people migrating back to Judea after seven decades in Babylon. The way of the Lord is an opportunity for the vulnerable to act. God reconstructs our wildernesses, by lifting and lowering and straightening and smoothing. God forges a highway above death-making institutions, exploitative politics, and predatory religion.

Yes, this text signals the way of God. However, God employs us as resilient construction crews to pave paths for our way back to peace. Advent is also about *our* coming and going, the ways we journey toward new horizons of harmony and embody the reconstructive ways of the Lord. God invades the world through human beings, the *us* that is fiercely enriched by our differences, daily inviting the world back toward peace. We—ordinary, imperfect, diverse humanity the world over—are

God's infrastructure plan for humanity.