

## Second Sunday of Advent 2021 C

What did the Voice of Jesus sound like? Advent is a time to seek God's Face, as the Scriptures often prayed: "Lord, let your face shine on us and we shall be saved." That face was made visible in Jesus so we could experience God looking on us with human eyes and divine love. But to really know someone, we want not only to recognize them by sight; we also want to talk with them, to hear the Voice of the one we love.

One of my earliest childhood memories is my father kneeling down beside the bed with me to pray. Though the time was brief, in keeping with a child's prayer, as a boy, it was my father taking the time to pray with me that left a lasting impression. I'm sure he was tired after eight hours and more working on cars and then, after work, fixing and remodeling at home. But night after night, like John the Baptist, my dad invested some of his time to teach me how to speak to God but also to listen for God's voice. Such a habit of prayer could not be passed along in an instant; only slow, steady, and patient investment brings faith to maturity.

The passage from Isaiah that Luke quotes here was a promise that God would end His people's exile and make a way for them to come home. The "Way of the Lord" that Isaiah mentions is the path God would prepare for their journey: straight, level, smooth. Yet we know life does not seem this way, even for people of deep faith. Sometimes, in fact, the way is quite hard – disappointments, losses, sickness, failures. The path God prepares for us often holds suffering and difficulties – the tragedies of news headlines; the unrest rooted in fear and uncertainty; the more personal losses and struggles of our families and relationships. These are hardly level and smooth roads. So there must be more to Isaiah's promise about the Way of the Lord than first meets the eye.

What Isaiah could not have known was that there is indeed another, related but far deeper meaning to the Way of the Lord ... ***the Way of the Cross***. “Whoever wishes to come after Me must take up His Cross and follow Me,” Jesus said to the crowds; and at the Last Supper, He told the Twelve: “I am going to prepare a place for you ... so that where I am, you also may be ... you know the way that leads where I go.” The way of sacrifice, the way of love, the way of mercy: ***that is the Way of the Lord***. That way began in Bethlehem with His humble self-emptying in a manger, and reached its fullness at Calvary with the Cross. There is no short-cut to this way; only the slow, patient, daily investment of prayer, and example, and service. But when we follow THIS way, we give witness to the world that we have indeed heard His voice.

While we don't know exactly what the Voice of Jesus sounded like to the crowds who heard Him 20 centuries ago, we can still recognize that Voice as it speaks today wherever we see kindness, sacrifice, love. We best prepare the way of the Lord when we listen for that Voice even in the wilderness of a troubled world, and discern what truly matters to God; so that someone might look back on some word of hope we have said, or some work of mercy we have done; and say: “That person's humble kindness helped me hear the Voice of Jesus; through another's goodness, I came to understand the Way of the Lord.”