

4th Sunday of Advent- EF
1 Corinthians 4: 1-5, Luke 3: 1-6

... and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

But salvation from what?

Lifeguards save swimmers.
Fire fighters save babies.
SWAT teams save hostages.
And my wife saved me from a life of meaningless relationships.

In today's Gospel, John wants us to be saved, too.
He is in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance.
Repentance is not just a guilty feeling about something.
It is more accurately understood as a reorientation of one's thinking—
a turning away from and a turning to. It is conversion.
It is fulfillment of the self, becoming the person that God created you to be.

John demonstrated this conversion physically by immersion in water.
This is also an immersion in the word of God.
It is bathing in his grace, a turning from and a turning to.

John is preparing the way for that immersion.
His ministry echoes the prophesy of Isaiah:

*...make straight his paths: every valley shall be filled:
and every mountain and hill shall be brought low
and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways plain...*

This is a pretty dramatic image.
It is second coming apocalyptic stuff.
My mountain experience has been with the Appalachians.
How could these winding ways be made straight?
How could these hills be leveled to fill valleys?

We are challenged to comprehend a twisting of ways, heights of hills and
lowliness of valleys that is more imposing than the Appalachians.
I am talking about the twists and turns, the highs and lows of human hearts.
The heart is more resistive to change than a mountain is to TNT.

What is going on in my heart that resists Jesus?

Is my life a whirlwind of activity? Do I take the time or ever summon the courage to look at *those* places in my heart?
Might I shy away, just rather be numb?

John's answer is immersion, a baptism of the heart.
By bathing in the word of God, our twists and turns and our lows and highs are made straight in preparation of God's salvation.
But saved for what?

A clue comes later on in our story with John the Baptist.

*(Jesus) came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove coming upon him.
And a voice came from the heavens saying,
"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Mt 3:16-17).*

In our immersion in the word, as our hearts are made straight and level, we are being prepared to hear those very same words,
"You are my beloved with whom I am well pleased."

God is burning with desire to say this to you.

Will you allow him? Will you prepare your heart to hear him?

What is winding its way in your heart?
What are the heights of obstacles to letting God in?
What are the low places that you refuse to discard?
These are what you are being saved from.

Allow your baptism to turn you toward that voice in heaven calling you his child.

Take advantage of the gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
Allow God to help straighten out the twists and turns of your heart.
Receive the gift of grace that God offers us this season.
After all, Christmas is the season of giving.

Advent is the season for preparing for that gift.
Our culture has picked up on that.

We have Black Friday and Cyber Monday.
Families are sending emails about wish lists.
People contribute to charities in record amounts.

It is about extravagance of generosity.

It's founded in our stories, religious and secular.

We have the Three Magi.

We have Santa Claus and the *Little Drummer Boy*.

All point to the greatest gift of all, the gift of self.

How do we give of ourselves?

There is nothing you have to share that wasn't first given to you...ultimately by God.

There is nothing that has been given you that you aren't called to share.

Our culture teaches us humility.

Even though we see in the media great displays of self-centeredness, I have found that most of the people I know carry around their mothers in their back pockets reminding them not to brag and not to toot their own horn.

While honorable, I find that in this act of humility we may tend to understate or undervalue that which we were given.

How can you share well if you do not have an appreciation of what you have been given, of what talents you have been imbued?

A search of your gifts gives rise to gratitude, not ego.

You did not create your particular nature.

It was given you... given to you to share for the benefit of others.

So, in this season of gift sharing, I ask you first to spend some time with God and peer deeply into your soul for how God has gifted you.

In gratitude, pass on that gift in the name of the Son, for whom we await.