

Building a Road

Rev. Dr. Bob Gibson © December 04, 2011
Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85 1-2, 8-13
Mark 1:1-8

The Text

Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort for God's People

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed, that her sin
has been paid for, that she has received from the
LORD's hand double for all her sins.

A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare
the way for the LORD make straight in the desert a
highway for our God.

Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and
hill made low; the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.

And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all
people will see it together. For the mouth of the
LORD has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I
cry?" All people are like grass, and all their
faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the
breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely, the
people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers
fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high
mountain.

You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your
voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to
the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"

See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and he
rules with a mighty arm.

See, his reward is with him, and his recompense
accompanies him.

He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the
lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.

Mark 1:1-8

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the
Messiah, the Son of God, 2 as it is written in Isaiah
the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of
you, who will prepare your way" 3 "a voice of one
calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the
Lord, make straight paths for him.'

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness,
preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness
of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the
people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing
their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan
River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with
a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and
wild honey. And this was his message: "After me
comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of
whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and
untie. I baptize you with 4 water, but he will baptize
you with 5 the Holy Spirit."

The Sermon

Building a Road

Invitation to sign up to be builds a road

This morning, I would like you to contemplate
signing up to join the Gibson Construction
Project. The project is to build a highway from
Petrolia to Tobermoray. This road would be a
direct route of 200 kilometers instead of 300
cutting through farmland, gravel roads, and a
couple of mountains in order to make this a
superhighway to the ferry. Construction will start
on January 1, 2012.

Before you sign up, I want you to be aware of
some of the obstacles that you will face. Some
major geographical obstacles will confront you
like removing trees, blasting through
mountains, straightening curved highways,
filling in valleys and paving the gravel roads.

Then there are those personal obstacles you will have to take into consideration before signing. For instance, if you are a young person with a family, working on the project will require you to be away from home during the week. Keep in mind that work is rigorous and at certain places dangerous.

Now keep in mind that we look after workers at Gibson construction. Because there is no union, although there have been attempts to form one, we offer great benefit packages. For example, our benefits include 100% dental, medical, and vision, as well as cost of living, travelling to and from the site and housing allowance. On site, we have famous chef who provides luxurious meals, massage and physiotherapist therapist are available.

Here's hoping that some of you will consider joining the Gibson construction team to work on this project. Neither age, nor gender, nor marital status restricts you from signing up for this project. Young people, mid agers, 70' or 80's we will have a place for you. Whether it is driving machinery: we will train you; or working in the kitchen with our cook, cutting trees, driving tractors to clear the land we will have a place for you. We can use your enthusiasm, desire, and wiliness to be a part of our team whether you work 10, 8, 6, 4 hours a day. While working on this project, new and exciting challenges will come your way and change your life. So do not delay, sign up today to build a highway.

Based on the morning's texts this sermon ought to be about building a highway for God. However, the invitation to lure you into scenario as imagery as it seems, appears to be more challenging than to place you in between two biblical texts assigned for today.

It seems to me that both of these texts appear to be played out beneath the surface of my invitation to sign up to a build a road.

In the Old Testament lesson, a fifth century prophet by the name of Isaiah invites his people to build a highway. Isaiah words of comfort to a people who are returning home from exile is for them to build a highway out of the wilderness of exile into the heart of God.

Isaiah invites the Israelites to sign up for the project with these words:

"Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed"

In Mark's gospel, John an odd-looking fellow baptizing folks in the River Jordon wearing clothes woven from camel hair and with a leather belt around his waist and diets on locusts and wild honey invites road builders to *"Prepare road for the Lord, make straight his paths"*

Invitation to build a new highway through the wilderness

Road building was nothing new to Isaiah. During his time, he witnessed a highway construction connecting two ancient Israelite kingdoms of Assyria and Egypt. A major highway, providing transportation for chariots and wagons, herds of sheep and camels, kings and rulers, became a grand highway.

Isaiah proposes a new highway as grand and spectacular as the one that connects the ancient kingdoms. Isaiah calls for those in exile to come on board and sign up to build a highway that connects out of the wilderness of exile to the promised land of God. Transporting the people without peace of God in their hearts to a finding new peace of God living in their hearts is what this new highway will do.

Although Isaiah mandates to build the road:

“Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed”

Building a road through the wilderness of one's heart toward God's does come with its obstacles. Let me suggest some of them according to the text:

I Build up the valleys of depression.

While living in exile, the Israelites had that pressed down feeling of hopelessness. At the lowest point of their lives, a new road would have to build around these valleys of depression and despair if it were to bring folks back to peacefulness of God in their hearts.

II. Level out the mountains and hills of self-centeredness.

Building mountains and hills of self-centeredness because you believe that you are God's chosen ones. Although unpopular as exile appears, it level down or cut down them down to size allowing them to more humble in their relationship to God. Now they are ready to begin building the road to God's hearts. A new highway provides the hope of peace of God centered instead of self-centered.

III. Straighten out the crooked places of sin and deceit. : Sin

John the Baptist appears announcing a new road that leads to God. As sin curves one away from God, repentance turns one toward God and makes the road straight.

IV. Smooth the bumpy, rugged, and rough places of faithlessness. As Isaiah looks back at the life of his people while they were in exile, he knew they experienced a rough and rugged road of with the possibility of giving up on God instead of having faith in believing God will be

able to smooth out a path for their lives. They had believed in God in the past, could they trust in God toward the future to make their lives smooth.

Obstacles like depression, sin, self centered , faithlessness get in the way of making the new highway smooth, straighten, level. Such obstacles get in the way of providing a highway that connects to God. .

Sign up for us

In a way, this seems to be the message for us this morning in both the texts.

The candle of peace is a candle, to light the dark places of our own wilderness as we allow the light to bring us peace as we travel toward of the place of Christ in our hearts.

Let us not forget to take into consideration those the obstacles that get in the way of preventing us from building a road: sin, depression, self-centeredness, faithfulnesses make us hesitate as to whether we want to sign up.

Signing up to build a road that leads from our heart to God's will provide an opportunity for a pregnant mother to travel along our highway.

The final destination for the mother is to give birth to a child in a stable, while the final destination for us ends up with a baby being born in our hearts.

The service is about to end.

You will have a couple of Sundays to decide whether you want to join the project of building a highway from your heart to God's heart.

Don't delay, sign up today to build God's highway.