Road Construction

09/04/16

Luke 3:4-5

*As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:*

*“A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. 5 Every valley shall be filled in,*

*every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.*

This has seemed like the summer for road construction. The Hwy extension in Carson City and the downtown changes, Jack’s Valley Road, and many other areas. I don’t ever remember seeing so many orange cones.

A couple of weeks ago I related a story about trying to pick up Mom and that the road construction was so extensive that I could not find a way to her street. I couldn’t use the correct freeway exit. There was at least a mile and a half of orange cones blocking my left turn. When I went around the large block I was again forced to turn the opposite direction from my destination.

It was frustrating; Mary was making suggestions because I was no longer thinking calmly, but we ran out of time. I am confident that we could have found a solution given enough trial and error, but we simply had to get to church. So we called Mom and apologized for not being able to pick her up and we found a way out of Carson and got to church.

Fast forward one week. On the freeway to get Mom – the same exit is closed again on Sunday morning. This time I had a better plan. We drove way past her location this time and were able to at least be driving in the correct direction. There were still all the cones and oil and all the construction, but I just turned onto her street, maneuvering through the barriers. We got her and made it to church.

Less frustrating this time: although I was not expecting the construction, we made a plan, stayed calmer, pushed the comfort and was successful.

This is life, isn’t it? We go along, same old route, same roads – and as long as everything is the same we are content, even minded, feeling safe and secure … but then … road construction.

Something happens and knocks us off our routine. Sometimes it is little things: we break a fingernail; we hit traffic; get in the shortest grocery line but it never moves because the person’s new debit card hasn’t been activated.

Sometimes they are big things that get us. We lose our job or don’t get the job we expected; a friend does something that angers us. Our spouse gets ill; we get ill.

This is road construction. The thing about road construction is that it is temporary. After a few weeks or months, much of the local road construction is cleared up and what is left is something better – smoother, straighter, safer. It may be inconvenient and makes us out of sorts for a short while, but we know it will come to an end.

When we hit ‘life construction’ sometimes it is just God working in our lives to make our pathway to Spirit smoother and more effective. We may feel out of sorts, as in all times of change and periods of construction, but God has a plan for us. We face some challenges because our habits need attention. Always doing the same thing, thinking the same thing, speaking and reacting the same way in each circumstance is not always the best way.

We can drive on the same bumpy road and memorize the potholes so we swerve almost absentmindedly at the same high rates of speed. We forget that just because we have memorized the dangers that doesn’t increase the safety of the road.

Just because we can control our temper and our tongue in challenging circumstances doesn’t make our hearts clear and filled with light. But it is the first step to civility – self-control. That is what the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule are all about: being civil – how to behave properly with each other in a social environment.

The second step came with the Christ and the teachings Jesus gave us. In the Sermon on the Mount he expands the concepts of the Ten Commandments from behavior to thought. According to what the Christ wants of us, “Thou Shall not murder” becomes “Thou shall not become angry with your neighbor; in fact, thou shall love your neighbor.” To not commit adultery becomes do not hold a lustful thought in mind.

Christ came to take our outer thinking and behaviors and move them inward to a higher level. We were to transform our thinking from that of a human being to that of a Child of God. This inner awareness extends to all areas of our lives. At the first thought of anything negative or harmful, we lovingly release that thought. It is counterproductive to dwell on anything dark; it allows space for it to materialize.

It is the dwelling on darkness that produces the greatest rough spots and potholes on our journey of life. Our thoughts are powerful; in a sense, they are our pathways during our walk on earth. We are not our thoughts, just like we are not the roads we drive on. But we choose our thoughts; sometimes they are intentional choices and sometimes they are unintentional habit.

The danger of uncontrolled negative thoughts is that they attract corresponding results. If we watch the news and accept the conclusions presented by some of the pundits, then no matter which Presidential candidate we support, they are the very spawn of Satan. If we listen to enough news, we will come to believe that we live in a world of war, fighting, dissention, and turbulence.

We may even erroneously ask ourselves, “Why does God allow this or that to happen. Why does God create destructive weather and circumstances? Why does God allow evil?”

These are not the questions to be asking. To ask these questions causes our roads to be rough and our way winding and circuitous. Why? – because we actually expect there to be answers, and we get frustrated when there are no answers. There are no answers because God is a God of Love and does not create tornados and hurricanes. We know why there are hurricanes: warm water and moist air.

We know what causes earthquakes: the sudden release of pressure as underground rock slips along a fault. We know what causes fires, and tornadoes, and floods. We do God a discredit when we assign all sorts of catastrophes as “Acts of God”. These are not acts of God; they are natural occurrences that have been happening since the Earth formed. God does not – cannot - do us harm ever, and that includes through natural occurrences.

Similarly, as humans we love to blame the Devil for our evil and unproductive thoughts and actions. I remember the character Geraldine back in the 60’s. Created by Flip Wilson, Geraldine would shake her hair and claim “The devil made me do it.”

We love to blame someone else for our thoughts, and actions, and what we say. But in truth, who controls our thoughts? We do. Who controls what words come out of our mouth? We do. Who controls our choices of action, or reaction and responses, and attitudes? We do.

We are responsible for how we react to the circumstances in our life. And how we respond is determined largely by what we constantly are thinking, by our mental habits, by the roads we most generally frequent as we navigate through Life.

Questions we might ask include: “God, how can I live in a way that positively affects the people around me and the world? How can I help quell the negativity and fear so many people are feeling? How can I bring more Light and Love and Peace to the world?” The more we live in the Light of God, the more we tend to respond with Light and Love and the Christ filling our hearts – and no matter what we face we know for certain that we can get through it.

If we typically allow the ego to dictate our responses and habitually react with the same resistant, negative, and fearful demeanor, then no matter what we face it will be miserable. Even the good things will be questioned. It’s as if we are driving on the best highway in the world but are ready to complain if we run over the smallest pebble.

God can only do so much; the rest is up to us. God wants to make our way smooth, fill in the valleys, straighten the crooks, but we have to be open to what God is doing or we will not notice. Without moving into prayer and shifting our consciousness toward Spirit, we will continue to take the old familiar bumpy, windy, and decrepit roads.

Our positive thoughts make a difference not only to our personal life, but to the lives of people around us, and to the world. I truly believe that the Light from each of our hearts brings Light to the World. The Christ said, “You are the Light of the world.” I believe that, and I believe we can share the Light that instills in our hearts.

I also believe our negativity, doubt, hatred, and fear – our darkness affects the world as well. God does not bring evil to the world – we do. Yet at the same time, it is through the awareness and acceptance of our darkness that can bring the most profound change to our lives. It is in the ‘wilderness’ of our thinking, in the unharnessed and untamed potential that we meet God and hear the voice of Spirit exclaiming “Prepare the way for the Lord.”

The path we are preparing is not one in a civilized pleasant place; it is in the wilderness - the wilderness of our lives, our self-centeredness, and our egos. This is the wilderness where God wants us to forge a straight and level path – from our hearts to God.

God is working in the background to make our way smooth, to reduce our mountains of erred thinking, and fill in the valleys of false beliefs and fears. We may encounter road construction along the way, but let us know that it is God within doing His works. As our lives transform to align with God, we may at first experience some orange cones of frustration. We simply have to listen for the voice in the wilderness and not be distracted, judgmental, or impatient in what we experience. It will take some practice, but we can look forward to a smooth, quiet, peaceful ride as God completes His work within us.

Let us pray….