

The God of the Open Highway

A Sermon Shared with the Congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
For Advent 2,

December 6, 2015.

Scripture Readings: Philippians 1:3-11

Luke 3:1-6

(by The Rev. Dr. Bill Steadman)

If you ask me why I spent a mindless 25 minutes watching most of an episode of Canada's Worst Driver, I can't answer you. I don't know why.

I have heard people discuss this show, but I could never enter into the conversation because I had not seen it. I like to be informed, but this particular viewing was hardly an attempt to increase my knowledge of what is on television. The fact that it was a slow night on television is no answer, either. One can turn off the television and go for a walk, or possibly read a book. One need not watch an inane show.

In this particular episode of "Canada's Worst Driver," there were a number of challenges – backing up a trailer and entering a four lane highway through an on-ramp were just two of them. Probably the most interesting was doing a 180 degree reverse u-turn, but to enter the turning area one had to back up through an extended driveway marked by cardboard boxes as barriers. One driver, who has had struggles in other challenges we are told, grabs onto the steering wheel, and in a death-lock style grip makes sure it does not move. She backs up quickly, and soon wipes out the whole row of boxes on the driver's side. She laments what she has just done: "I don't know what happened," she complains to the instructor, "I must have turned the steering wheel." The instructor is quick to tell her exactly what happened.

"You got in the car and held the steering wheel hard and steady," he began.

"Then you backed up without looking into your rear view mirror to see where you were going, and went straight into the barrier." To my amazement, this episode, and the instructor's insights, solved the mystery of the meaning of this week's scriptures for me.

The images from the prophetic tradition: “Prepare a way for the Lord; make the paths straight.” Yes, the valleys will be filled in and the mountains levelled. Have a straight way and there is no way on earth you can make a mistake or go astray. Or is there? One need only watch “Canada’s Worst Driver” to see the fallacy in that assumption. The desire to make a straight path is not surprising – it is common to see the challenges of life as sourced from the outside world, not from what we can control.

Yes, there are things we cannot control, and we may find ourselves in impossible situations. The whole rush to support refugees from Syria and elsewhere reminds us that people face challenges not of their own doing, and not easily solved. Yet many times we are quick to blame our surroundings and not take responsibility for what we face, or what we do. As Unarine Ramaru puts it: “Pray for change in your heart and not your circumstance, and you will see what will happen.”

Who is Unarine Ramaru? He is a young man in South Africa who graduated from high school only 5 years ago, and has been a social commentator, blogger and journalist ever since. He is the founding editor of *Y-not Culture* magazine, and lives in Free State, South Africa.

His age may be early 20’s, but he is an example of young blacks in South Africa who have a vision of their country, and the world, that is far different than it was 30 or 40 years ago, because they have heard and seen the example of leadership of Nelson Mandela, and as he opened doors and hearts to others. Now the next generation or two in that country are doing the same. No longer do they need to await the road getting easier, but these insightful blacks are able to face the ongoing struggles and challenges knowing that they can make a difference.

So what can we do in our land, in our place, in our time?

It was Martin Luther who said: “It is the business of tailors to make clothes, and cobblers to make shoes – so it is the business of Christians to pray.

On this peace Sunday of the Advent journey may we keep ourselves mindful of opportunities to make the way straight and unencumbered with that which complicates the journey, or gets in the way of understanding.

We also can pray for a new way of being. That is not beyond the realm of possibility. Let us travel with a renewed sense of purpose, and an openness of heart, for as we open doors, and open our hearts, the living reality of the Christmas meaning that “God is with us – Emmanuel” may be known by us all.