

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Last weekend I was blessed to attend the synod senior high youth event Chrysalis with some of our youth. The theme of the event was Caution: Deconstruction Zone. The event focused on 3 physical walls: the Berlin wall, the wall between the U.S. and Mexico, and the wall between Israel and Palestine. The retreat also made those in attendance think about their own personal walls. I thought about these large walls that have been built in the world to keep others out. I thought about internal walls that I and others have built to keep other people or groups out of their lives. I began to ask the question of why. Why have these walls been built? What am I protecting myself from? What are we protecting ourselves from? Why are these walls created? Who are we not hearing by building these walls?

As I listened to discussions on walls and on different viewpoints I couldn't help but think and pray about the gospel lesson for today. It might be a stretch, but for me I kept coming back to every mountain and hill shall be made low and paths will be made straight when I envisioned walls crumbling. I also thought about the one in the wilderness when I thought of the people on the other side of the walls.

When we first hear this text from Luke, we get a list of rulers at the time. At the end of that list we hear that the word of God came to John in the wilderness. The one in the wilderness is the one who God came to, not a ruler in power. And then this voice in the

wilderness began teaching and preaching about a baptism for the repentance for the forgiveness of sins and quoted the prophet Isaiah to “prepare the way for the Lord.”

This voice in the wilderness...could it be a voice on the other side of the wall? I think a lot of it depends on what side of the wall you are on...

Think for a moment of people in our nation’s history who have been a voice in the wilderness...a person who stood up to make paths straight and to make mountains and hills low. We may think of the second continental congress that stood up for our nation’s independence. We may think of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. who fought for civil rights.

My question for us all to think about, who are the voices in the wilderness that we hear today? Who are the people on the other side of the wall? Do we hear them? Do we ignore them? Who are the voices in the wilderness? Is it a mother who lost her child in war? Is it someone like Jon Stewart who creates humor around the decisions of our nation’s leaders? Is it the homeless? Is it the single parent who is sacrificing everything for their child’s welfare? Who are the voices in the wilderness?

John the Baptist, the voice in the wilderness during Jesus’ day makes us feel uncomfortable. John calls us to repent for the forgiveness of our sins. He calls us to remember our baptism...to remember our calling in our baptism...that we are called and claimed by God as his children. In that calling and claiming in the waters of baptism we

should try to remember to listen and help those voices in the wilderness. It's hard to hear voices in the wilderness when we are bombarded by other messages that contradict what the voices in the wilderness; what the voices on the other side of the wall are saying.

One of the short video clips that the youth watched at Chrysalis was from the Christian Rock band Jars of Clay concerning their ministry in Africa called Blood: Water Mission. This ministry deals with the HIV/aids pandemic in Africa. After the group visited Africa and learned about the poverty and unclean water that African people were living with they decided that they had to do something. Once they learned about the situation, they had to help.

There are a variety of ways that we can help those voices in the wilderness. I smile when I think of all that Saint Nicholas does to help some voices in the wilderness. We've collected coats for kids, sent a truck load of food and supplies to victims of hurricane Katrina victims, Operation Christmas child, Tree of Angels, and much more. We have a vision to help other voices with an infant day care upon completion of the North Wing.

Are there voices that we've ignored because they are on the other side of our wall? For me personally, I can say yes. I've ignored some of those voices and I shouldn't have. I haven't spoken up for someone who was being treated unfairly. I've ignored others by driving by them when they needed food or a blanket. It's difficult to listen to and support all of the voices of in the wilderness. It's hard to listen to the other person or people on the other side of the wall. The best place to start is to listen and learn about that voice in

the wilderness or the person or people on the other side of the wall. After learning what the situation is, we are better equipped to do something. We are equipped to show God's love through our actions to that unheard voice.

There are many voices in the wilderness today. There are inequalities between people. There are still mountains and valleys. We still seek one who will make everything equal. Sometimes we look for someone strong and charismatic. Sometimes we look for a good leader who seems to be a voice for the people to make paths straight for us. Sometimes we look in the wrong places...The one who will make our paths straight and everyone equal comes in a manger. A tiny baby who grows up and takes on our sin on the cross making us all equal.

Prepare the way of the Christ Child. Let us pray to God for help to hear the voices in the wilderness and the voices on the other side of our walls.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.