

# Which Way Shall We Go?

## Inspired by Luke 3:1-6

In the second year of the Pandemic when social media seemed to reign over all, when governors and legislators and families and pastors and teachers and parents and healthcare workers were trying to navigate these unique and challenging times, the word came of yet another strain of the coronavirus. Tensions tightened in some regions of the world while in other areas populations moved about as if there was no risk at all. Some people were proclaiming the end times shouting, "Repent and seek forgiveness for your sins!"

Lynette sat in her living room reading her Bible. She kept it close like a best friend. The leather cover was worn on the edges, and there were prayer cards and notes stuffed throughout the pages. This is where she turned for all the answers and wisdom and inspiration. After watching the nightly news that is so often packed with stories of ugliness and misery, she needed to remind her heart of this Good News. She needed to regain a Spirit of hope this Advent Season. Turning to Isaiah, she slowly and prayerfully read the words of the prophet — "A voice of one crying out in the desert: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

Lynette closed her eyes and opened her heart. "Yes, Jesus. Thank You, Jesus." She prayed this over and over until she felt the room was filled with these beautiful words. She felt surrounded and protected by the love of God come what may tomorrow. She felt at peace as she made her way upstairs to bed. News of the virus was indeed troubling. She didn't know the answers to her many questions about it. Experts seemed to contradict one another and authorities appear just as bewildered and confused as the rest of us. But, still she felt peace because one thing she does know is that God is always with us, and His Love and Mercy are mightier than any other force.

Settling under the warm covers, Lynette closed her eyes and reflected on her day — when did I recognize You in this day, Lord? When did I fail to see You? When did I turn to You, or forget to turn to You? When did I serve You well? She decided to make an appointment for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. After all, every day is a good day to repent and seek forgiveness! She restrained the urge to continue manufacturing to-do lists, and instead breathed deeply and deliberately that she could listen to God's whisper. As she drifted off to sleep, she prayed, "Tomorrow, may I think and speak and act with wisdom and courage. God help me to see Your face and hear Your voice in every moment." Lynette quickly entered a restful, dream state.

Let's take a peek into Lynette's dream. Picture yourself standing before an ancient tree, one the magnitude you have never before seen. It is magnificent and beautiful, yet there is an air of mystery about it. Its branches are able to provide shelter for all the creatures of the air and shade for all the creatures on land. You stand quite a distance away and have an

overwhelming desire to be near the tree. You notice there are several paths leading to the tree. Some are straight, others more curved, and a few seem to wind all around crossing the shorter, less complicated paths. One path appears to be covered in brambles and has sections covered in jagged rocks.

Your instinct is to jump on the shorter, more direct path that leads straight to the center of the tree. Perfect! Easy! Your mind says, "Hurry! This is a shortcut to eternal happiness and protection from all evil!" But, your gut says, "Wait. Is that the best way? Eternal life lies at the end of whichever path you take. Choose carefully." You strain your eyes, but realize you can't actually see where any of the paths end exactly. What if some of them don't lead to true happiness and the Salvation of God?! Perhaps traversing rough patches and overcoming struggles along the way will make you stronger and better prepared! Your heart begins to race. It is all so difficult and confusing. So, you take a moment to close your eyes and breathe slowly and deeply. You ask the Lord which way to go. You can feel yourself growing calm again.

Opening your eyes, the next step is somehow very clear. You travel along a nice, worry-free path. All is well. This must be the right way. You are feeling more confident so you pick up the pace. But, suddenly the path narrows and darkens. It looks like some spots sink into the earth. You hear strange noises and feel as if something bad is about to happen. Should you continue on this path, or take another route? Your immediate options all seem to lead away from the grand tree. You feel frozen and afraid. You turn around, but you don't see a way to go back and start over again. So once again you close your eyes and pause to pray for guidance. You remain very still and stay perfectly quiet. Listen. Your surroundings are now silent. You begin to feel warmth and love. Your heart tells you to take another step. Then another. Trust. Let go. Another step.

Soon you are picking up speed and energy. As soon as you begin relying on your own instincts, obstacles reappear. The path becomes steep and quite challenging. You want to stop and give into the fear. Take a moment. Be still. Breathe. Pray. Listen. Trust. You realize that you're carrying heavy baggage loaded with fear, worry, suspicion, control, judgments, prejudice, greed, negative thoughts, doubt, and anxiety. Let it go. Set it down. Be free. You hear a whisper, "This is how we prepare the way of the Lord."

Understanding washes over you and you feel light. You are humbled and graced and blessed. You are well aware that the terrain hasn't changed, but Jesus is walking with you. As you take each next step with Him, the path becomes straight, the valleys are filled, every mountain and hill are made low, the winding roads are made straight, the rough places made smooth. You know with your whole being that continuing this course, you shall one day see the Salvation of God!

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