

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

### **Title: The World I Dream Of**

#### **Lesson: Luke 3:1-6**

*3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—<sup>2</sup> during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>4</sup> 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.  
<sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled in,  
every mountain and hill made low.  
The crooked roads shall become straight,  
the rough ways smooth.  
<sup>6</sup> And all people will see God’s salvation.’”*

Today is the Second Sunday of Advent. Advent is a season of waiting for the coming of Christ. This morning, we lit the second candle, known as the Bethlehem Candle, which represents peace. As we lit this candle, we did so with hearts longing for God’s peace to come into the world.

What does the coming of Christ mean to you? To put it another way, what kind of world do you dream of? Each person’s vision of a dream world might vary, but most of us would include elements like a peaceful world, a good place to live, a world where people trust one another, where citizens trust their government and the media, a world without pain, wounds, suffering, worry, or fear. It would be a world where everyone is equal and respected, a place where justice prevails. Surely, none of us desire to live in a world filled with tension, stress, anger, distrust, chaos, and war.

How close do you think the world we live in today is to the world we dream of? Do you feel they are close, or does the gap between them seem wide?

Over the past week, I have been reflecting on the kind of world I dream of. Like you, I long for and await the same kind of world. However, from my perspective,

there still seems to be a significant gap between the world we live in and the world we dream of.

Two months ago, I felt great joy when I heard the news that Han Kang, a South Korean author, had won the Nobel Prize for Literature. I was proud of her as the first Korean to receive this honor. What delighted me even more was the fact that I could read her award-winning novel in its original Korean. I've always believed that translations, though valuable, cannot fully capture the nuances, expressions, and subtleties of the original language. So, being able to experience her work as she intended it brought me immense joy.

Her award-winning novel is *Human Acts*, a work deeply tied to the collective memory of May 18, 1980—a day etched in the hearts of all Koreans because of the unforgettable events that occurred. This date marks the backdrop of her story.

Today's democracy in South Korea was built upon the sacrifices, efforts, sweat, and blood of countless individuals. In the turbulent post-war years, South Korea endured many struggles to establish democracy. There was a time when the country, during politically unstable periods, was ruled by coups, uprisings, and dictatorship.

In 1980, General Chun, then a high-ranking military officer, staged a coup using military force, and he succeeded. Unlike today, when information technology keeps the world connected, the media at that time was under his control. As a result, most citizens were unaware of the truth until it was too late, and Chun had already consolidated his power.

In the city of **Gwangju**, located in the southwestern region of South Korea—my mother's hometown, where my maternal grandmother still lives—citizens rose up to resist General Chun. About a million people gathered in Gwangju, protesting to protect democracy. General Chun saw these protests as an obstacle to his ambition to become president. When the protests intensified, he declared martial law. Soldiers and tanks from eight brigades and divisions were deployed to Gwangju.

Yes, as you might imagine, under his orders, soldiers aimed their guns at the protesters and fired. Soldiers, whose duty it was to protect the nation and its people, turned their weapons against civilians.

The tragic outcome: 166 people killed, 179 missing, and 2,617 severely injured. Through this brutal suppression, Chun rose to power and became South Korea's 11th and 12th president.

This is the historical backdrop of Han Kang's *Human Acts*, and it is also the historical trauma South Koreans associate with martial law.

Though democracy seemed to gradually take root in South Korea after Chun's regime, the unexpected martial law declaration by President Yoon earlier this week, at 10:23 p.m. Korean time on Tuesday, has shocked the nation and set its democracy back by 45 years.

Before this event, if someone had asked me, "Does history progress?" or "Does humanity improve?" I would have answered yes. But now, I hesitate. This event has also reminded me of why Jesus Christ had to come to this world and why He had to die on the cross to save us.

Why did Jesus have to come? Because before His arrival, there was no hope—no hope that we could ever become better, no hope that we could move forward, even one step at a time, in the right direction. By our nature, we are not good. We cannot, by our own strength, create the world we dream of. It was true 2,000 years ago, and it remains true today.

In Luke 3:1, we read about the emperor, governor, and other leaders of that time. You know who Pontius Pilate was—a man who compromised truth for his own success and unjustly condemned Jesus to death. Even 2,000 years ago, the world was corrupt and hopeless. That is why Jesus had to come—to die on the cross in our place so that we might live free from sin.

Before sending Jesus, God sent one person to prepare the way for Him: John the Baptist. Though John lived in the wilderness, wore camel's hair, and ate locusts and wild honey, he was God's chosen prophet to call people to repentance and prepare the way for Jesus.

John proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near," quoting Isaiah: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight paths for Him. Every valley shall be filled, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth."

The gap between the world we live in and the world we dream of remains. Today, the powerful still oppress the weak, and injustice and dishonesty erode trust. Suffering and discrimination persist.

- "Every valley shall be filled" signifies the restoration of the oppressed and the lifting of the lowly.

- “Every mountain and hill made low” speaks of the proud and unjust being humbled.
- “The crooked roads shall become straight” symbolizes a world where injustice and dishonesty are corrected.
- “The rough ways smooth” envisions a world free from suffering and discrimination, where all live equally.

As we wait for such a world—the kingdom of God to come—we rely on the Holy Spirit’s help to humble our pride, fill the valleys of guilt and despair with God’s grace, and align our crooked paths with God’s Word.

In our December church newsletter, I came across a meaningful quote I want to share with you:

“John Wesley said there are two types of holiness. Personal holiness, where you grow your personal relationship with God, and social holiness, which is loving and supporting your neighbors. To be a complete Christian, we need to focus on both. He wrote: The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love, is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.”

The world we dream of is not free; it doesn’t simply come to us. It is a world we must strive to create through the guidance of the Holy Spirit throughout our faith journey.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will guide our feet and walk with us on this journey, leading us to a world of hope.

*Guide my feet while I run this race.  
Guide my feet while I run this race.  
Guide my feet while I run this race, for I  
Don't want to run this race in vain!  
TFWS 2208 Guide My Feet*