

The annual Sunday School Christmas pageant on December 9, 2012 precluded Sunday's sermon. Here is an earlier sermon prepared by Pastor James Brown for the Second Sunday of Advent.

A WILLFUL ACT OF IMAGINATION

Advent 2 – Cycle C: Luke 3:1-6

I first heard the term “weave lane” from our older son, Graham, when he was learning to drive. I believe he learned the term from his driving instructor, using it to describe that rather short stretch of road which appeared on westbound Highway 7 where it crosses Highway 8. Many of you will remember frequent traffic jams at this interchange, caused either by volume of traffic or the almost-daily accidents that occurred as vehicles tried, during this short bit of pavement, either to exit from or enter Highway 7 westbound. Those leaving the highway would have to skilfully insert their vehicle into a stream of flowing traffic whose sole purpose was to insert their vehicles onto Highway 7. Vehicles constantly wove in and out of this tiny lane; hence, the term “weave lane.” There is also a weave lane on University Avenue eastbound.

For years, nothing really changed at the Highway 7-9 interchange, other than the ever-increasing traffic slowed progress through this intersection even more. Eventually, plans were announced for a re-working of the crossing; first, however, a new ramp was built for northbound Highway 85 – a strategy for easing the backups on westbound Highway 8. What we now call the flyover, was the fix for the weave lane; but it came two years later, and was still not effective in easing the traffic jams and accidents because Highway 8 eastbound needed to be widened to accommodate the ever-increasing traffic; and this was no small chore. There were places along the highway where the ground fell away quickly from the side of the road; the roadbed had to be built out and up in these areas. And finally, the bridge across the Grand had to be widened to complete the project. Mercifully, most of the work is now done, but it took years!

I was not privy to every aspect of the decision to take steps to clear up the design problem with the intersection of Kitchener's two main access routes. But every once in awhile, it was possible to glimpse the decision-making process that was taking place. In the mid-1990's a friend told me that the properties on the west end of old King Street had been optioned by either the city or the region so that a new ramp could be built to northbound 85. Later, there were countless letters to the editor of the *Waterloo Region Record* concerning the poor design of the busiest interchange on the Conestoga Expressway. It is human nature as well as the way to political longevity to make gradual changes, rather than dramatic, sweeping changes. (Keep the political risks low, in other words.) There was reluctance on many sides because of the huge cost of the project. The region also had to get the support of the provincial government and, depending on which government was in office and the state of the provincial books, there was at the very least a well-considered response to the proposal. Nothing happened quickly.

Hindsight, of course, is 20-20, but constructing a weave lane at what would be predictably the busiest intersection on Highway 7 suggests to us a mistake in judgment. It is reasonable to assume that many people shared in the original decision – and their reasoning for choosing a weave lane instead of something safer and more practical was probably quite convincing at the time. But conditions change and variables vary; and like it or not, people are often called to make new decisions which may well negate earlier decisions. From a purely human point of view, times such as this are difficult. They not only require humility and creativity, they call for a willful act of imagination, that is, something that rises above the many things which, on a personal level, threaten to pull us down, or on a corporate level beg fragmentation of a community.

The Baptist's metaphor of a straight and level highway notwithstanding, what John is really calling for in today's Gospel is not so much about road-building (an unintentional theme in this sermon), as it is taking an approach to life and an approach to our life of faith that embraces the humility and creativity and willful acts of imagination that make room for God. Unfortunately, John appears as somewhat of a caricature in the gospels – the effect of his bizarre dress and diet. But the integrity of his message is pure gospel. For Christ to make a difference in our life, in our church, in our world, we must make room for him. John calls us to do as the Bethlehem innkeeper and his wife did for Mary and Joseph. Instead of saying to ourselves and to others that all the rooms are full, John calls us to a willful act of imagination – a place of openness and prayer, a place of risk and vulnerability, a place rich with the capacity for blessing, room for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The ability of our government leaders finally to take this step in the re-creation of the Highway 7/8 interchange has blessed millions upon millions of motorists.

What could happen in our world if our international leaders were called by us to a willful act of imagination concerning justice and peace? concerning economic disparity between developed and developing countries? concerning global warming?

What could happen in our life if we were called to a willful act of imagination concerning whom we consider as our neighbour? how we decide to spend our money? the choices we make in how we use our time?

Welcoming Christ into our life, into our church, into our world requires some preparation. Christmas is a wonderful annual reminder for us of how truly to be the people of God in Christ. Amen.