As many of you know, I went to Shellbank for Junior High School on Ave. X and Batchelder Street. How many of you went there also? When I was there, all the students were required to take shop classes for each of the semester. I remember taking metal shop, wood shop, printing shop, electric shop, and cooking (or home economic) shop. There are others shops such as movie and dance/theater, but I didn’t take those. The school believes that the their Junior High years are when the students begin thinking about their future. They can become more well-rounded, not only through academic textbook studies but also through hands-on experience and personal disciplines. These classes not only taught the students some basic skills in life...but they also taught us how to follow instructions, develop patience, disciplines, leadership skills, and to work together as a team.

 I remember the metal shop teacher’s name was Mr. Gold (what an ironic name for a metal shop teacher, right?) This was a real hands-on class as we learned how to make something totally from scratch with a piece of scrap metal and a piece of scrap wood and turning them into some practical usage. This was my final term project for the semester…It’s a plaque with the NFL Logo that I had to hammer into shape and then prepare a wooden base to support it. It’s kind of like two projects combined into one.

 I remember Mr. Gold told us that one of the first things we have to do is to burn that piece of raw metal in a very intense fire in order to burn out any impurity within the metal. It also softens the metal so that it becomes easier to bend into the shape and the size that we want. We would then have to “**smooth out the rough edges**” and then eventually polish it by machine and finally by hand in order to make it shine. This whole process required a great deal of self-discipline and patience. As I reflect upon that experience, I come to realize that my teacher was teaching us invaluable lessons in life that **Nothing comes easy overnight. And that in order to make things happen, we must work hard for it.**

 I find it fitting for us to reflect upon during the season of Advent which we are in – a season of preparation and hope of what is to come. But before we see the finished product, we must have patient to wait, while we keep ourselves busy with our works cut out for us. What you put in is what you get out of! **This is what the season of Advent ALL about.** We put our lives to the ultimate test by passing through the refining fire as we “smooth out the rough edges” of our lives. **It’s about self-examination, repentance, and spiritual cleansing as we prepare ourselves to receive Christ into our hearts.**

 Like a piece of scrap metal, we acknowledge that we are not perfect (only Christ is!). Our hearts and our attitudes may need to be soften in order to allow God to bend us, shape us, and mold us into who we are called to be and what we would like to become. Like a piece of raw wood, we all have our rough edges that need to be sanded down with sandpaper. This process must be repeated over and over again, until the final inspection comes. Ultimately, we will be held accountable and be graded upon for the efforts that we put in.

 Our all-knowing Creator knows us inside and out, and knows our every motive and intention of our hearts. As the Apostle Paul reminded us that, ***“for ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and [we] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.[[1]](#footnote-1)*** God has a plan for all of us (individually and as a whole). The question is, are we willing to let God’s plan work in our lives, or are we simply trying to run our own course?

 The two passages that we read earlier reminded us that we are living not only in-between time but also in an eschatological time…the End time near. We do not know exactly when Christ may return, but one thing we do know for sure is that we must be ready and prepared for that day when it does come. The final inspection, the final exam will come in the unexpected hours. So expect the unexpected! Meantime, we must continue to fine-tune our effort recognizing that we are a constant work-in-progress. **There’s always room for us to grow and to get better at what we do**. We must continue to work hard in our due diligence and faithfulness before the ultimate judge comes and gives us the final grade. We must justify the grade that we think we deserve and ultimately the inspector’s decision is final!!! **Our hearts must become malleable and teachable to God’s grace, so that we may become agents of transforming miracles and reflectors of God’s love and hope in this world.**

 Going back to the metal shop class that I mentioned earlier. I do not recall the final grade that I got from my project. It might have been a B+ or A-. I knew all along that it was not perfect. There were a few mistakes that I made early on in the process. Some mistakes may be corrected but some were irreversible. Similarly, think of times when we regret for the mistakes that we make in life, don’t we all have those moments. We wish we had planned ahead better. We wish we had said YES to this or NO to that? Would’ve, should’ve, but didn’t. But it is what it is and we must own up to the mistakes that we made in life. By God’s redeeming grace, God is willing to give us a 2nd chance in forgiving us and reconciling with us, if we humbly come before God in a contrite heart and spirit.

 This is why Christ was sent into our midst onto this earth at the precise time and in the precise place. **Through Christ, God’s Word became flesh in the fulfillment of God’s promise. Christ was sent on a mission to smooth out our “rough edges” in life with the woodwork of his own. From the wooden manger at the lowly stable at birth, to the old rugged cross on the hill of Jerusalem upon his death, we have witnessed in full circle of God’s greatest miracle and triumph for our own salvation and remission of sins.**

 Furthermore, **God’s timing is not our timing**. We don’t know how long this process will take, but we must continue to work toward finishing the product until the inspector comes. Whatever we can finish, that’s what we will be graded on. None of us holds God’s time in our hands. So we must be prepared at all times. As our text reminded us earlier that “*with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.”[[2]](#footnote-2)* None of us holds God’s time in our hands.

 However, our passages today call upon us to do more than just waiting. When we wait, it does not mean that we should be idle with our faith while waiting for Jesus to come and to rescue us, but instead we shall remain actively engaged with the works that Christ has set aside for us through our faithful obedience and commitment to the work of the Gospel.

According to the prophet Isaiah, a voice cried out in the wilderness, ***“Prepare the way of the LORD,
          make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
           and every mountain and hill be made low;
      the uneven ground shall become level,
           and the rough places a plain.
 Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
 and all people shall see it together,
          for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”***

This voice, this cry of helpless desperation, was being heard in the midst of those who are suffering and grieving. These are voices living in exile as refugees from their homeland. These are the people who have felt abandoned for the long silence of God. There are voices of mourning for those whose family loved ones were tragically and untimely taken away from us. Some may ask where is God in the midst of all of these sufferings and tragedies in this world? How long must we wait for the expected Savior before our patience runs out?

 No matter how distant God may seem from us at times, God’s voice can still be heard and is constantly calling us back to embrace us. Even if we have gone astray from God, God still wants us back. God desires us to turn back to him and to live in full communion with him. As our text this morning reminds us that even ***the grass withers, the flowers fades, but the word of our God will stand forever!![[3]](#footnote-3)*** That’s God’s promise for us during this uncertain time.

 As we continue to discipline ourselves through this spiritual exploration in the remaining weeks of Advent, let us humbly ask ourselves:

* **What voices are we hearing right now that are crying out in the wilderness amidst turmoil and chaos of our world today?**
* **What voices are calling us to respond to our God in the hearts of repentance, as we “smooth out our rough edges” of our lives?**
* **What are these mountains that need to be made low and valleys lifted up?**

 From the words of our denomination’s Co-Moderator, Rev. Denise Anderson, she commented, “These mountains and valleys are our high notions and low expectations. Sometimes we need to prepare the way…by getting out of the way!” and let the Holy Spirit lead us. Even more so, let the little child, the expected Savior lead us.

 Friends, God’s invitation for repentance is a life-long one, with no expiration date, but that does not mean we can slack off with our faith and do whatever we want. The Spirit has moved us into a life-long commitment of discipline and obedience. So, let us keep our eyes and our hearts opened and focus on what God is already doing amongst us. Let us be on the lookout for God’s challenges in our lives, as we bear witness to God’s love among those who are crying out in the wilderness.

 It does give us HOPE and PEACE knowing that our “rough edges” in life will be smoothen by the grace of God. Our cries in the wilderness will be heard by our unexpected expected Savior. But first, we must *make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill shall be made low. Every uneven ground shall be leveled and every rough place made plain.* Thanks be to God.

 In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Romans 3:23-24* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *2 Peter 3:8* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Isaiah 40:8* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)