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Luke 3:1-6  
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### Opening our arms

Good morning Church

Jesus is coming! Are you ready to meet him?

Here comes another surprise, Jesus's cousin is proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John the Baptist does not proclaim it from a pulpit, but as a wild man in the wilderness. How many of you have gone out into the Sierras looking for a wise man to teach you about God? I know I have not. But the baptist needs to go out into the wilderness because the wilderness journey is a journey of letting go.

And so, The baptist goes out into the wilderness, telling the people that they are carrying something that needs repentance. I do not want to confuse you. I don't think that repentance is about feeling sad or being told you are wrong. Instead, repentance literally means to turn around. Repentance is like seeing two paths in front of you and choosing to take a sharp right-hand turn instead of continuing on the road you know. Repentance is looking behind you and realizing that you've been going east, when you meant to be going west. Repentance is opening our eyes to how we need to change.

But today, I hope you can consider Repentance as like when we are carrying a heavy burden and we let it go. Think back to Exodus. When the Hebrews left Egypt, they kept the gold, which they turned into a golden calf. They had to let go of idols. Then they cried out for Moses that they had meat and garlic in Egypt, but Moses reminded them that God will provide and they let go of the notion that they needed a slave master to feed them.

Or think back to the exile, where the people have gotten so used to Babylon after spending 70 years there, which for most is their whole lives. So they do not see any reason to return to Jerusalem. But still, a voice cries out from the wilderness, to prepare an easy and flat highway from exile. The Israelites must give up their positions in court, neighbors, and even family members who decided to stay behind. The road back to God is a difficult one, but sometimes in this life, you need to let go of something in order to pick up something new.

Going into the wilderness is to let go of the ways of Egypt and Babylon so that we can open our arms to God's embrace. Let us consider what we need to let go of, what are the ways of Egypt or Babylon that are keeping our hands clasped over some precious thing, rather than having open arms to receive God's embrace?

What do we need to let go of so that we can receive God's embrace?

For John the Baptist. He had to give up a life of safety, because when he traveled into the wilderness, preaching about repentance, he called King Herod to repent of marrying his sister-in-law, and by speaking truth to power he painted a target on his back. For us, what do we have to say to the Emperor Tiberiuses, Pontius Pilates, and Herods of this world? What do we have to say as witnesses of peace, when we face the tragedy of school shootings and Russian troops on the Ukraine border?

What are our golden calves that we have made? I think about Chrisitan's sin of certainty, where we are so sure that we know what God thinks that instead, we have made God into our own image. That we make God into a Democrat or Republican, or make God into a white middleclass Mennonite. That we make gods of ourselves and whatever we think is right.

I could keep listing things, but I think most of you get the point. Many of us are carrying heavy burdens that we keeping us from God's embrace. Perhaps this burdens are like a heavy weight of shame that keeps our eyes downcast so we cannot see God's open arms. Perhaps our burden is like a precious thing that we keep our hands clasped tight around, so we cannot open our arms for God's embrace. But today, I hope that we can consider how these things are holding us back from a deeper relationship with God. It may be pride or shame. Privilege or margialization.

But I pray that God's embrace may give me humilty for my pride. And forgiveness for my shame. Self-empty me of my privilege and empower me for my marginilzation. So that we may all be beloved Children of God. All baptized in the same water. All embracing the same God.