

PROVIDING BETTER FUTURES IN PERU

BY EMMA WAGNER, CONGREGATIONAL ENGAGEMENT MANAGER

MATTHEW 3:1-12 | FINDING HOPE IN THE WILDERNESS

In today's gospel, John the Baptist appears in the wilderness and proclaims, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." His voice cries out in the wilderness, an unexpected place to hear God's word. John was considered a wild man — eating locusts and honey, living on the margins of society, called to live a different way. When we think of repentance, we often think of feeling sorry for things we've done wrong. And that's certainly part of repentance, but John is inviting us to think more deeply. Repenting is a chance to turn away from the values of this world which leave us dissatisfied — status, wealth, power — and allows us to reframe our thinking in preparation for Jesus' birth. This means turning away from the systems of the world that create suffering, injustice and oppression, and towards a future of God's deep peace and life-giving love. John points us away from our old ways and toward a better future, toward the promise of God's kingdom here on earth.

In the Castrovirreyna province of Peru, far up in the Andes mountains, it can feel like wilderness. There is one road in and out of the community; a road that washes out when it rains. Most of the families rely on donkeys or llamas for transportation, and there is little internet service. Because of this lack of infrastructure, few doctors, engineers, architects or teachers choose to live there. When Lutheran World Relief went to Castrovirreyna in 2011, the community was in the midst of a devastating famine and two-year drought due to extreme weather. There were no seeds to plant, tools, equipment or animals. Some families were able to leave the community to find food closer to the larger cities along the coast, but those left behind had little to survive on. The future seemed bleak and full of suffering.

Deysi Milagros Canales Machuca and her family were one of the families that stayed, growing just one type of potato to survive. Deysi and her older brother were in danger of acute malnutrition, especially anemia, because of the lack of nutrition and diversity in their food. Today, more than a decade later, Deysi and her family are leaders in their



Deysi and her daughter have a brighter, healthier future in Peru because of your support.

community. Because of your kindness, they now have a greenhouse with leafy vegetables that are full of iron to eat, grow a wide variety of potatoes, and raise cuy (guinea pigs), pigs and sheep. In a place where work conditions are difficult and the community is hard to reach, step by step your support accompanied the community members as they built back their local economy. Now Deysi is in school studying to be a nurse and her newborn daughter Alice will grow up with enough food to eat and a hopeful future.

In Advent, we are called to make room for Jesus to enter our lives. We hear John's message of repentance and confession in preparation of the coming Savior and are reminded that his is a message for us as well. We too are called to repent and confess our sins so that Christ's love can come into us and transform our lives for the sake of the world. Jesus is coming not to condemn us for our sins, but rather to help us to see his face in our neighbor's. This Advent, we have an opportunity to think differently about how we help bring Jesus' promise of a better future to our communities, whether here in the U.S. or in places like Peru.

1. **John is calling us into a time of repentance. What does your congregation need to hear about preparing their hearts for the coming of Jesus?**
2. **Coming out of a pandemic, it's easy to remember a time when we felt like we were in the "wilderness." How are you creating community as your congregation continues to find its way back together?**
3. **What are some areas in the life of your congregation where you find hope? What areas could be reframed to allow for the kingdom of God to flourish?**



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