

Sermon, Advent 2B, 12/6/2020

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Find Scripture Readings at:

https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Advent/BAdv2_RCL.html

St. Mark launches his Gospel with these simple words:

*The **beginning** of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

In the first scene of Mark's Gospel, a grown John the Baptist appears on the scene, near the banks of the Jordan River, preaching a baptism of repentance.

Mark's Gospel reveals that

The Good News is not only what comes AFTER repentance.

Rather, contrary to popular imagination, repentance *is* Good News. Repentance is the BEGINNING of the Good News.

All three of our scripture readings today call us towards work that is not always easy. Our readings call us to set ourselves wholeheartedly:

To the work Of Repenting

To the work Of Preparing a way for the Lord

To the work Of Proclaiming Good News

And--here's the real clincher--our readings call us to the work of repenting, and preparing, proclaiming Good News, ***in the midst*** of the most difficult work of all: the work of Waiting.

The Mystery of Faith invites us to believe that

The Good News is not only what we hope will come AFTER all the Repenting, and Preparing, and Proclaiming, and Waiting are over

Rather, we live in the confidence that our Repenting, and Preparing, and Proclaiming, and Waiting are, in fact, themselves, the BEGINNING of the Good News.

My friends, if it's true, this is Good News indeed.

And Oh! How we long for Good News.

Perhaps--with time, and with practice, and with God's help-- I could learn to bear the Bad News over which we humans have little control or responsibility--the inevitable facts of death and disease and natural disasters.

What I find so overwhelming is the Bad News that we humans--day after day, century after century, millennia after millennia--continue to CHOOSE! The Bad News we continue to visit upon one another and upon the earth. It is the seemingly endless cycles of greed, and violence, and inequality and destruction that we humans create and perpetuate that nudge me towards despair.

And, for me at least, the hardest part is knowing that, despite all my good intentions, I am an inextricable part of the sinful systems and patterns and habits and choices that generate so much of the Bad News in our world.

I find myself sitting on my couch, watching the news in horror as Libyan Refugees are drowning in the sea, and elders in the ICU are dying of COVID while overwhelmed healthcare workers take their own lives, and Black Men are struggling face down on the pavement gasping for air, and Native Americans are protesting for the right to live and work on their ancestral lands. And then in an instant, in the "click of a link", I find myself wandering through the crowded "aisles" of Amazon.com buying Christmas Presents for my kids.

In the midst of my *apparent* comfort, the irony, the dissonance, the *discomfort of this reality* weighs heavy upon me.

A voice says,

"Cry out!"

And I said,

"What shall I cry?"

All people are grass,

their constancy is like the flower of the field."

In the moment of this utterance from today's first reading, the prophet Isaiah seems no *less* disappointed in humanity, no *less* despairing for the state of the world, than I do.

And yet the Divine Voice that calls out to Isaiah (the same Divine Voice that calls out to you and to me) will not be silenced! The persistent love of God, The Gospel Voice will not be dissuaded, neither by humanity's interminable failings nor by the gravity of our guilt and despair. Whenever we find ourselves tempted to give in to despair, or to give up on the prayer that God's will, **will** be done "on earth as in heaven", God pierces through our weariness with a clarion call.

The voice cries 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..."*

The Divine Voice speaks, My Dear One: Here's a broom, start sweeping. Here's a shovel, start shoveling. Because I am on the move and I'd like to show up--I'm ready to make an appearance, right here in this desert. You don't have to level all the mountains or fill in all the valleys. You have neither the tools nor the power to do that alone. But you *can* do your small part to ready my path. Don't say you're too tired. Don't say "it's no use." Just pick up the shovel. Or pick up the broom. And get my path ready. Then listen up, I have more work for you:

The voice cries out:

*Get you up to a high mountain,
O herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities
"Here is your God!"*

The Divine Voice says, Dear One: Be bolder than you feel in proclaiming HOPE! Be braver than you feel in proclaiming GOOD NEWS! Climb up that mountain and open your eyes; scan the horizon and lift up your voice, "People, O People! Here is your God!" Here is your God! Not far off, but HERE! Not just coming soon, but HERE already. Not just in some far off, future world of your dreams, with racial equality and just access to resources and a COVID vaccine. ***"Here is your God!" "Your God is here!"***. Here, in the desert. Here, in the wilderness. Here, in the cold, lonely shadows of night. This is the divine promise, the "Glorious Impossible", the miracle of Advent; This is The Good News: that in Jesus Christ, God has *already chosen*---God has already made the *final, eternal, irrevocable choice*-- to come and dwell *with* us right here, right now, in the midst of our sin, in the midst of our mess, in the midst of our human frailty and finitude...

Comfort, O comfort

God is already here

Sitting beside us on the couch as we gaze at the fire and scroll through cyber-Monday sales on our phones

Comfort, O comfort

God is already here
Clinging to us as our rubber raft sinks and our family is swallowed by the cold dark sea

Comfort, O comfort

God is already here
Standing strong at our side as we cry out for justice and for water and land

Comfort, O comfort

God is already here
Lying face down, beside us, as we draw our last breath
In a cold ICU beds or a hot city street.

*Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.*

The Comfort is this: that God is here, with us.
Even in the midst of injustice, and sickness, and sin.

But right here, with God's Comfort
Is also God's Call

The same God who comforts, Calls us to Repent
To turn our hearts and our lives more fully towards the future **God** wills for our world...

A world where
*the uneven ground **shall** become level,*

A world where
*the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and **all** people shall see it **together**.*

The same God who comforts, Calls us to Prepare

*In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God*

The same God who comforts, Calls us to Proclaim
To go **beyond** comfort
To speak up, and speak out,

*Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.*

*Speak tenderly
and cry
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid*

*Cry Out to the cities
Say "Here is your God!"*

*Who will feed his flock like a shepherd;
and will gather the lambs in his arms.*

And the same God who comforts, Call us to Wait

*Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years,
and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some
think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to
repentance.*

This is the **beginning** of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

We repent. We prepare. We proclaim. And We wait.

This is the **beginning** of the good news of Jesus Christ.

*Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.*

This is the beginning. But it is not the end.