

Sunday, December 10, 2023 – 2nd Sunday of Advent

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Introduction

John calls people to repent, to clear the decks, to completely reorder their lives so that nothing gets in the way of the Lord's coming. The reading from Isaiah gives the context for this radical call: the assurance of forgiveness that encourages us to repent; the promise that the coming one will be gentle with the little ones. Isaiah calls us all to be heralds with John, to lift up our voices fearlessly and say, "See, your God is coming!" We say it to one another in worship, in order to say it with our lives in a world in need of justice and peace.

Prayer of the Day

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming strengthen us to serve you with purified lives; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

First Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11

¹Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

³A voice cries out:
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴Every 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.

⁵Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

⁶A voice says, "Cry out!"
And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

⁷The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.

⁸The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand forever.

⁹Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;

say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!"

¹⁰See, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.

¹¹He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Psalm: 85:1-2, 8-13

¹You have been gracious to your ^l land, O LORD;
you have restored the good for- ^l tune of Jacob.

²**You have forgiven the iniquity ^l of your people
and blotted out ^l all their sins.**

⁸I will listen to what the LORD ^l God is saying;
for you speak peace to your faithful people and to those who turn their ^l hearts to you.

⁹**Truly, your salvation is very near to ^l those who fear you,
that your glory may dwell ^l in our land.**

¹⁰Steadfast love and faithfulness have ^l met together;
righteousness and peace have ^l kissed each other.

¹¹**Faithfulness shall spring up ^l from the earth,
and righteousness shall look ^l down from heaven.**

¹²The LORD will indeed ^l grant prosperity,
and our land will ^l yield its increase.

¹³**Righteousness shall go be- ^l fore the LORD
and shall prepare for ^l God a pathway.**

Second Reading: 2 Peter 3:8-15a

⁸Do 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. ⁹The 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. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

¹¹Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, ¹²waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? ¹³But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

¹⁴Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; ^{15a}and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

¹The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

²As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;

³the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,’ ”

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Prayers of Intercession

With hope and expectation, we offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all who await God's day of restoration.

A brief silence.

Send forth your faithful people with words of promise and forgiveness. Teach your church to be bold in revealing your good news in word and in deed. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Reveal your majesty in mountain peaks, flowing rivers, and blossoming wilderness roads. Heal the earth where it longs for renewal. Bring wholeness to the earth and all its creatures. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Turn the hearts of the nations toward righteousness and peace. Increase cooperation for justice between countries, commonwealths, political parties, and diplomatic leaders. In times of prosperity, direct leaders to be generous for the sake of all. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Comfort your people with tender words of love and healing. Surround all who are grieving, all who know depression or anxiety, or all who feel lonely or forgotten. Be a steadfast presence when all else feels uncertain. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Grant holy patience to all who are waiting this season. Give hope to those seeking employment. Bring reassurance to people awaiting new diagnoses or treatments. Protect expectant parents. Watch with those who keep bedside vigil. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

With you a thousand years is like a day. Bless the memory of the saints from ages past and the anticipation of saints yet to be born. Inspire us to live with faith as we await your new heaven and new earth. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Listen to these and all our prayers, O God of hosts, and restore us with your great and everlasting mercy.

Amen.

A reflection for this Second Sunday of Advent

Prophecy, Patience, and Promise

Advent is a season of expectation, the word itself meaning "coming." Many families spend these four weeks waiting for children to come home from college, or for grandparents to come for Christmas dinner. For young children, these days of waiting can seem like a thousand years. Others are amazed at how quickly time is flying, as they sense the end of their own lives drawing near. In the interval, stories from the past are told and retold as a way of remembering the significance of these waiting days.

The arrival scripture speaks of is both more profound and more sublime. It is the coming end of a way of being that has seemed like exile, like imprisonment. It is salvation from all that has torn us and our world apart. As we wait alongside the readers of Mark's gospel, we too hear voices from the past in the prophetic words of Isaiah (and Malachi and Exodus) that prepare us to receive the one who is coming into the world: Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:1).

As with any long period of waiting, we know that the final days are the hardest to bear. We struggle to understand why we ourselves, never mind the rest of creation, must wait any longer for the salvation and redemption God has promised. Our salvation is bound up with one another's though, and we are reminded that God has been patient with us, "not wanting any to perish" (2 Peter 3:9). We therefore practice patience with God as we remain steadfast in hope and lead lives of holiness and godliness worthy of the new era that is coming (2 Peter 3:11-12).



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