

Second Sunday of Advent – December 3rd, 2023

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.

Greeting – The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
who opens the heavens
and draws near to us with salvation.

Amen.

God is patient and merciful, desiring all to come to repentance.

Trusting this promise of grace, let us confess our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Everlasting God,

you love justice and you hate wrongdoing.

**We confess the fear, greed, and self-centeredness
that make us reluctant to work against
oppression.**

We are complicit in systems of exploitation.

We choose comfort over courage.

We are careless with creation's bounty.

Look upon us with mercy.

Turn our hearts again to you.

**Make us glad to do your will and to walk in your
ways for the sake of our waiting world.**

Amen.

Hear these words of assurance:

God clothes you with garments of salvation
and covers you with robes of righteousness.

In the tender compassion of † Jesus Christ,
your sins are forgiven.

God's covenant is eternal,

and God's blessing rests upon us all.

Amen.

Gathering Hymn

“Prepare the Royal Highway”

#242 vs. 1,2,3

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.

Reading from 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.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

Children's Message

Holy Gospel according to Saint 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."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ

Sermon

People of God, grace to you and peace from God, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN.

"The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

In Marks Gospel, the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God happens at his baptism.

As we find ourselves in this second week of this season of hope, this season on the verge of, the cusp of, the birth of the Christ Child, we are brought 30 years into the future, to when the Christ Child is to be baptized.

And, in Marks Gospel, this points us to the humble nature of this *whole* story.

What we know of the characters in this story is that John the Baptizer is Jesus' cousin. In Luke's Gospel, it is John who is in Elizabeth's womb and leaps when Mary enters with Jesus in her womb.

From conception, John's life is about Jesus!

From the time that he was in his Mother's womb, John is excited to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

And this story, 30 years after John and Jesus meet while they are in their mother's wombs, is no different.

John spends his time in the wilderness. You might say he is a mountain man. The description of him in Mark's Gospel is one that I would imagine would have few of us wanting to interact with him.

Yet, that did not stop him from being:

³the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

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

John shouted in the wilderness about a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People from all over the countryside would come to him to be made clean in the waters of baptism.

And, he could have taken all of the glory. He could have made a fortune off of the hopes of those who came from all over, selling them eternal life and all that this baptism would mean for them.

Yet, when people started to ask who he was and from whom this power came, John deflected.

John's whole mission is to PREPARE (there's that word again) folks for the coming of the Messiah. John's whole mission is to remind folks that a hugely important step in that preparation is repentance.

And, more subtly, his mission is to remind them, and us, to not concern them/ourselves with worthiness.

It may seem like nothing but think about it for just a moment.

A man who *could* have made a fortune on selling folks on what this baptism meant for them, instead tells them that someone greater is coming after him.

“I simply make you clean with these waters, but the one coming after me will fill you with the Holy Spirit. I'm not even worthy to untie the thong of his sandals.”

That last line may seem like nothing, until we think of how frequently and readily we discount ourselves based on our perceived worth.

John knew, and shouted from the wilderness, that he was not worthy to even untie the thong of Jesus sandals, but that did not stop him from proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ.

John knew, that even though he was not worthy, that the words of the Prophet Isaiah were words that needed to be repeated. That the mountains will be brought down, the valleys will be lifted up, the crooked will be made straight, and the rough will be made smooth.

John knew, that even though he was unworthy to untie His sandals, that the promise of the Good News of Jesus Christ was more important. He knew it was a message that needed to be heard, and he didn't concern himself with worthiness, or even looking the part, the message was more important.

What does that say for us as we ponder this season of hope, in a world that at times seems hopeless?

How does that shape our preparations this Advent season as we ponder what it means to immerse ourselves in preparing, and not in the worry of being prepared?

What does it say to us who are so ready to say that we are not worthy to proclaim this Good News of Jesus Christ, that John's story points to the humility of the larger story?

As we look to the Christmas story that we will hear told through song and children acting, do we realize that we, too, have a place at the manger scene gathered around the Christ child?

As we come to the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, are we willing to lay aside the false narratives of needing to make ourselves worthy, and be reminded that we are made worthy in the baptism that Jesus brings, in which we are filled with the Holy Spirit, and marked with the cross of Christ forever?

People of God, as we approach this Christmas season, and wait anxiously in this Advent season of hope, know that there is indeed a place for you in this story, no matter your perceived worthiness.

Thanks be to God. AMEN

Song of the Day

“All Earth is Hopeful”

#266

Apostle’s Creed

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 (*especially*). 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 (*We pray especially for Peyton, Matt, David, Irene, Clarice, Steve, Kathy, Val, Jacob, Cherri, Keith and JoJo, Bob and Joanne, Frank and Heather, Bob and Sonja, Bill and Betty, Tom and Kay, Sherm and Mary, family of Irene Kries*). 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.

Offering

Offertory Prayer

God our provider,
by your merciful hand
abundance springs up from the earth.
Receive and bless these gifts of your own bounty.
Let them be a sign of your steadfast love
and faithfulness for all people,
through Jesus Christ our Savior.
Amen.

Words of Institution

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Communion #471 & #454

Prayer

Generous God,
in bread and cup you have revealed your glory
for all people to see together.
Nourished by this meal, send us out to proclaim
your good news of liberation and release,
brought to birth in Jesus Christ our Savior.
Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Keep Awake.
Okay! We will! Thanks be to God!
And all of Good Shepherd said...
AMEN!

Sending Song "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" #257 vs. 1,4

Blessing

The God of peace bless you,
the love of Christ sustain you in hope,
and the anointing of the Spirit ✠ remain upon you
now and forever.
Amen.

November Financial Snapshot

Your Generosity in Action: Through November 29

Our 4th Quarter Mission Offering Partner,
Feed My People Food Bank,
has set a goal to raise \$100,000 in funds to ensure that
every member of our west central Wisconsin community
can celebrate the holidays with a full heart and a full
plate. We are grateful to join them in these efforts.



THANK YOU!!

Total Revenue **\$19,824**

Total Expenses **\$20,417**

Difference to date:
-\$593

Our prayers are with the family of Irene Kries, who passed away Nov. 26. They are planning a private graveside service.



Please return your commitment cards by Dec. 10.

End of year donations must be at the church office by noon Dec. 29.