

The Messenger ...



A Whole New World



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Acknowledgement:

There's A New World Coming: An Advent Journey, John van der Laar, Sacredise.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT



Mark 1: 1-8

Reflection:

The man, John, is an important figure, both in the Gospel story and in our learning to follow Jesus. In Mark's Gospel there is no dramatic narrative telling of his unique birth and no clear mention of his relationship with Jesus. There is just this strange man who comes, as it were, out of nowhere with a manner and a way of dressing that would immediately have evoked images of the Old Testament prophets in the minds of his hearers. He catches people's attention, but he doesn't draw attention to himself. His whole purpose is to point the crowds to another, more important person to come. He is there for no other reason than to prepare people for Christ, and when his job is done, he simply slips into the background again.

There is a tremendous confidence and a tremendous humility represented by John. He was confident in who God had called him to be and in the job he was to

do. But, he was humble enough not to let this go to his head, not to claim more for himself than was his right, and not to resist letting go of the attention of the crowds when his time was up. He knew his task, and he did it - no more, no less.

Which raises some challenging questions for us. We may not be Johns or Christs. We may not have any kind of public platform, or any task to do that holds such global significance. But we are all called and we all have a part to play in God's reign. So...

- Who are you in Christ?
- What has God given you to do for the sake of God's reign?
- How good are you at judging when to act and when to retreat, when something is yours to do, and when your task is to stand back for others?
- In what ways can you be more intentional this week at fulfilling God's call on your life?



Prayer: O God, who is always preparing me for the coming of your reign, and who is always calling me to help others prepare, teach me what you would have me do. Do not let me hide or despise my particular gifts or tasks and nudge me when I need to get out of the way and let others do the work. Most of all, help me to have confidence in who you have called me to be, and the humility simply to be myself. AMEN.

SECOND MONDAY OF ADVENT



Acts 2: 37-42

Reflection:

The confidence and humility which John and Jesus displayed continued to be seen in the new community which formed around Jesus' message and mission. They knew that if they were to continue the work that Jesus had given them, they needed to do it together, with each one taking their proper place, and using their unique abilities in harmony with others. The result of this way of life was an amazing impact on the people around them.

It can be tempting when we are part of a community to fade into the background and allow others to do the work. It can also be tempting to take control of the things we are passionate about and keep others from sharing or participating effectively for fear that they may —step on our toes. But something miraculous happens when we

embody, together, the life and message of Christ: it literally changes the world! John the Baptist may have been the messenger heralding the coming of Christ, but we are all, together as Christ-followers, messengers of the coming of Christ's reign - God's new community of love and grace - into our world.

- In what ways can you share, cooperate with and help others in your community as you, together, seek to share the life and message of Jesus?
- Where might you need to step up and take your role with greater sacrifice and commitment?
- Where might you need to step back a bit and make space for others?
- In what ways can your participating in a Christ-following community help to demonstrate God's reign to your neighbourhood?



Prayer: God of Grace and Love, It's good to be on this journey of life and faith with others, but sometimes I feel like it would be easier if I just left it all to them. Other times I feel like I wish they would just let me do what I know I'm good at and stop getting in my way. But you have called me to be part of a community, and part of my journey means learning to live and share and participate with others. So, please teach me how to belong and how to help others to belong. Teach me to share in whatever way I can in the life and work of your new community. And teach me to take my part in showing your grace and love to the world. In Jesus' name. AMEN.

SECOND TUESDAY OF ADVENT



Psalm 27

Reflection:

Though life sometimes gets very hard and painful, and we feel threatened by forces beyond our control, the Psalms offer the comfort of knowing that God's people have always had to navigate these realities. In today's reading, the Psalmist finds refuge in an intimate relationship with God, knowing that nothing that can happen will ever be able to sever the connection that God's people have with God.

Three wonderful gifts arise from sheltering in God in this way. Firstly, the Psalmist discovers that worship becomes a source of life even in the midst of the turmoil. Secondly, flowing from the act of worship, prayer flows easily and honestly, because the Psalmist knows that God is near and is always caring. Finally, out of prayer, flows a confidence in God's ability to bring life and joy even in the darkest of

situations. These gifts were, essentially, what John the Baptist was offering to the people as he prepared them for Christ's coming. They were living in difficult times and were longing for God to come and deliver them. John assures them that in the midst of the turmoil, God has not forgotten God's people, and that they will know God's presence, God's confidence and God's protection no matter what outward circumstances they may have to face, because God's Sent One is soon to be walking among them!

- In what ways do you need to be reminded of God's gracious and sustaining presence today?
- How can you best open yourself to God's presence and comfort?
- Alternatively, who might need you to be a John to them, reminding them that God has not forgotten them, but is coming to strengthen and save them? How can you best offer this message to them?



Prayer: God, even in the most difficult times, you are always coming to me, always bringing your comfort and shelter for me to take refuge in. Thank you! Help me to trust in you even when life gets hard and painful. And help me to find ways to be the agent of your grace and comfort to others who need your healing touch. In Jesus' name.
AMEN.

SECOND WEDNESDAY OF ADVENT



Luke 1: 5-17

Reflection:

John the Baptiser was born to be the forerunner of Christ. It all sounds so easy when we read it in the Gospels, but for Elizabeth and Zechariah the experience of being challenged by God's call, of being confronted with God's messenger while burning incense, of becoming parents-to-be in their old age, and of carrying the weight of this child's significance through the pregnancy and then through John's childhood could not have been easy!

It is always like this when we respond to God. It may be tempting to think that following Jesus is meant to make life work, meant to take away all struggle and pain and sacrifice from us, but the Scriptures give a very different picture. The life God offers is indeed full and vibrant and meaningful, but it does not get this way by putting us in some —bubble away from the realities of the world. Rather, it is as we engage the pain and struggle of the world, as we offer our lives in service of God and others, as we learn to live out of God's call, and help others to encounter the God

who seeks to welcome them into God's amazing reign, that we discover abundant life. Elizabeth and Zechariah took on a huge responsibility when they were called to be John's parents, but with all of the struggle, work and heartbreak they also knew God's presence and life in a way that they could never have done any other way. If their son was faithful in fulfilling his calling, it must have been, at least in part, due to the courage and faithfulness of his parents!

- In what ways is God asking you to take on new responsibilities or challenges for the sake of God's reign?
- What struggles may you have to endure as you seek to follow Christ?
- How can you learn to embrace God's abundant life in the midst of service and sacrifice, rather than by trying to escape from the world's difficulties?
- Can you commit to one thing today?



Prayer: God, sometimes I wish you wouldn't call me to be part of what you are doing in the world. Sometimes I wish you would just swoop in like Superman, fixing everything and leaving me to just watch in amazement. But you don't work like that do you? You ask for human hands and wombs, human voices and hearts to be the channels of your grace and love – and sometimes the human 'resources' you seek are mine. Help me to embrace the challenge of being a participant in your coming into the world, into the lives of the people around me. And help me to willingly give myself in whatever ways you may ask of me, to serve and love you and others. AMEN.

SECOND THURSDAY OF ADVENT



Philippians 3: 7-11

Reflection:

The message that John the Baptist preached was one of preparation for the Coming One. Then when Jesus came, his work was to invite us into the life of God. It is this life that the Apostle Paul celebrates in his letter to the Philippian church. Written toward the end of Paul's life, this letter reflects a longing for intimacy with God that had not diminished throughout Paul's life and ministry, in spite of the many hardships he had endured. In his life, the ministries of both John and Jesus had done their work!

In this Advent season, we do well to reflect on our own experience of God and God's life. We may want to ask ourselves whether we share the longing that Paul expresses, whether the message of God's life has taken

root so fully in our own hearts. The wonderful opportunity that this season offers us is to nurture our longing for God, and to remember again that God is always coming to us, always available to us, and that, if we desire intimacy with God, we need only make the time and space for it to happen.

- In what ways do you feel a longing for more of God's presence and life?
- How does that longing show itself in your life?
- In what ways can you nurture your desire for God, in order to grow into a deeper relationship with God?
- How can this Advent season help you to do this?



Prayer: O Loving God, you know how much I long to know you more. You know my desire to be closer to you and to love you more. I know that this longing is a good thing, and that, in one sense it will never be satisfied, because there is always more of you to get to know. Teach me to nurture my love for you in small daily acts of worship. And teach me to let my love for you be seen in my life so that it may stir a longing for you in others. AMEN.

SECOND FRIDAY OF ADVENT



Habakkuk 3: 2-6

Reflection:

How do you respond to Habakkuk's vision of God? It is an awesome picture of power, judgement and glory, and it fits well within the message of this Old Testament prophet who was aware that a time of judgement was coming on his nation. In our world, it may feel a bit out of sync, though. It can be hard to put together these glorious visions of God with the image of God that Jesus revealed - but it is important to do this work, especially early in the Church year. There is so much that can be said about this, but perhaps the most important is to recognise that Habakkuk's vision of God is not a contradiction to the God we see in Christ. Jesus made it clear to us that the heart of God is grace and love, and so even these powerful visions of God should be seen in this light. What can help us in this work is to recognise that whenever God expresses judgement against people in the Scriptures, it is because of human injustice.

What this means for us is that our relationship with God cannot be

separated from the struggle for justice in the world. In some way we are called to connect our daily choice to follow Christ with God's desire for a world of love and justice. This is why Jesus' message of the Reign of God is so important. On our own we may not be able to make much difference, but as we contribute our time, talents and treasures toward the work of God's Reign, our small contribution is added to the work of God's people everywhere, and it does make a difference.

- In what ways can you imagine the sight of God coming to judge injustice in our world?
- How does this fit with Jesus' concern for the poor and marginalised? How does God's desire for a world of justice impact your understanding of what it means to be a follower of Christ?
- How can you contribute today, in some small way, to the work of God's Reign?



Prayer: Almighty God, Some of the visions we see of you in the Bible are really frightening, and I find myself uncertain of how these visions fit with the way you showed yourself in Jesus. But, I know that behind your acts of mercy and your acts of judgement are the same motivations - grace, love and the longing for justice in the world you created. Teach me how I can be part of your compassionate Reign in my daily life and strengthen me to use what resources I have in service of you and others. In Jesus' name. AMEN.

SECOND SATURDAY OF ADVENT



Matthew 21: 28-32

Reflection:

Today's reading offers a tough parable, which Jesus told to confront the religious leaders with their failure to recognise God's message through John the Baptist and God's coming in Christ. In this section of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus challenges the religious leaders of Israel because, although they think they are part of God's Reign, they have missed the point.

Though they think that —sinners are being excluded, through Christ the rejected ones are discovering God's love and life. It's an important warning, especially as we reflect on God's coming through this Advent season. We may be tempted to think that God is only coming to us and those who are like us, but Jesus makes it clear that God comes to all people, and if we become complacent and self-righteous, we might just miss the signs of God's Reign when they're right in front of us.

The tragedy of the Gospels is that, as Jesus pointed out with respect to John's message, these religious leaders failed to heed the warnings they were given, and they never did learn to recognise God's coming to them. They could have shared in the wonderful liberation of God's reign, they could have discovered a new life together with those that they had previously thought of as unworthy. But, instead, they clung to their own view, and they missed God.

- In what ways are you like these religious leaders, clinging to your view of how God works, and closed to any radical, new ways God might be revealing God's self to you?
- In what ways are you different from them - more open to the radical inclusivity of God's reign, and more aware of the challenging message of the Gospel?
- How can you be even more mindful of God's presence and grace in your life and those of others?



Prayer: O God, sometimes your love is offensive. Sometimes I find you loving and accepting and welcoming those whom I think are unworthy – those who live or believe or worship differently from how

I believe they should. But then you remind me that it is only your grace that gives me a place in your Reign, and so the same must be true for everyone else. And, if that's the case, then I don't get to say who is in and who is out. I only get to learn to love and serve the ones who are around me, whoever they may be. Thank you for your grace and love. And thank you for teaching me the welcoming ways of your Reign. AMEN.