



Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Second Sunday of Advent

December 10, 2017

Good News Welcomed!

Mark 1:1-8

In the name of the Father and of the Son and in the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Advent is a time to pause/refresh; though it often seems to be speed up/rewind. Know the feeling? Sense the rhythm?

I have watched a bit more carefully this past week in my travels. Here are some of the signs of the times: traffic, workers ahead, "detour," a handful of coupons offering pathways to quick Christmas solutions; there is an embed of anxiousness and in our ever present immediate news cycles, we are aware that the world is awash in need, for actions of love, waves of hope, and the peace which Paul once wrote was "beyond human understanding." Like self-giving love, agape, which gives without expectation of return.

So here we are, at worship, in sacred space where mission is launched, lives touched and we "listen, learn, and dream." This Lord's Day, lighting a second candle as we wait for the Lord. Wait for the One who is coming soon, just at the right time, and whose life stories we know as "gospels, good news." The Good News of Welcome!

1. Beginnings. Where did you begin? The time and age, the place and people, and what was the world like them in those days? For me, it was 1946, in a town to the East, Spokane. To a loving, post-war, gettin' on family. Longing for beginnings in what were pretty certain times. (The Good Old Days☺)

It seemed to be so some years after the death of Jesus. You know the story. He died, He was raised and ascended to the God He would call "Abba, Father."

Sometime between 60 and 80 AD/CE, Mark wrote a story which was foremost about God. He wrote out of oral tradition, the stories told for nearly 30 year about a man named "Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth." And this is how Mark began the account meant to be shared with a worldwide collection of churches who were outgrowing the houses of their faithful roots: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." One who would, with a few disciples, begin a vigorous ministry of preaching, teaching with authority, casting our demons, healing the sick, cleansing lepers, raising the dead, feeding the hungry, and giving sight to the blind. Who would one day as those who followed "Who do YOU say that I am?" And it began in a way that was

2. WEIRD and WONDERFUL! John, the son of Elizabeth and Zechariah, cousin to Jesus. He came out of the wilderness. Don't miss that symbol! Not the place where you usually hear words worth holding on to...

This is the weird: clothed with camel's hair/leather belt around his waist (King James language likely would read "with loins girded.") /eating locusts and honey. A bit like the old cartoon of the monkish guy holding a sign, "The End is Near." In our times, the response might be "Call 911!"

Wilderness = the place where the First Testament folk came out of and into the promised land; and the clothing and diet seem to invite a comparison to Elijah, the Prophet pointed to change, renewal into life. The work is to prepare the way, make straight the path, clean the streets for newness if breaking out all around. Wake up, watch, be ready! This is no small deal folks!

This is the wonderful: THE GOOD NEWS BREAKING IS THE TELL OF A BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. And what person in any time and place would not welcome that kind of potential to live life fully, in tandem with God and one another, in a collaboration to turn the world right side up?

A bit like the every Lord's Day, preparing a moment where we confess and you hear, I hear, "ALL of your sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake, REJOICE IN THIS GOOD NEWS!" A Cross, a life! Today!

I like the word "all," as in no one left behind, left out! And Mark writes: "...from the whole Judean countryside (the whole Pacific Northwest, if you will!) AND "ALL THE PEOPLE OF JERUSALEM WERE GOING OUT...AND WERE BEING BAPTIZED...CONFESSING THEIR SINS...GETTING READY FOR THE ONE WHO IS COMING SOON! And the WONDERFUL found words...

3. He will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Now notice that the first mention of Jesus is that He is "the one more powerful." Literally, THE MIGHTY ONE! No small deal here, remember?

John the "weird," forgive me, is the one who will point to Jesus the "wonderful." The Savior of the world.

What was the world waiting for? A new slate, a clear pathway from the one who "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," sorrow for sin and open to change in God's good timing!

Mark 1:9...the very next verse after our Gospel Reading says "And it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John." Amidst ALL those people comes a lone individual from what we might call a "hick-town." Washed and sealed as the divine-human one, the Word made flesh to dwell/tent smack dab in the middle of the world.

What are we to make of it? Good question! It is about the Holy Spirit, who in The Nicene Creed we confess to be "the Lord and giver of life who proceeds from the Father and the Son."

Advent is about an opening of our eyes, our ears, and our lives to that which is beyond and above us, yet, within us today.

Advent is about a time to reset our waiting mechanism. To get into grace time/metronomic time for the sake of our beloved musicians---to Andante or Allegro is the question a world that often demands Presto to Prestissimo even in the time of Advent...which calls for us to prepare the way of the Lord for ourselves, for others, for the sake of the world and the mission we share.

The Holy Spirit powers intention in lives: the Word of God, the life of prayer, the return to the Jordan Baptismal font of remembrance were we have died to sin and been raised to life now and forever. And all just in the nick of time!

How's your waiting, your preparing the way? I HAVE HEARD AND SEEN YOU IN MISSION THESE DAYS. NOT JUST BUSY STUFF, BUT "STRIVING TO BE FOUND IN HIM AT PEACE, WITHOUT SPOT OR BLEMISH; AS THOSE WHO REGARD THE PATIENCE OF THE LORD AS SALVATION, FORGIVENESS." To follow the leading of the Shepherd, the Savior, Jesus.

Today, that One spreads a Table before us. In and from whatever wildness we are in these days---it is a place of feeding, strength and safety for we are never left to it alone.

"People, look east, and sing today...
Love the Guest, is on the way.
Love the Rose, is on the way.
Love the Star, is on the way.
Love, the Lord, is on the way."

And trust God, trust me, all of that is HERE TO STAY FOR YOU AND FOR ME. What's News? Jesus is coming soon, even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen!