



# Second Sunday of Advent

December 6, 2020

Prelude: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

## Gathering

Lighting the Advent Candles

Reader: On this Second Sunday of Advent, we light the candle of love.

Reader: Our God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Reader: For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.  
*John 3: 16-17*

Reader: We light the candle of hope and this candle of love as a sign of our expectant waiting for the coming of Christ.

**All Singing: "Everlasting God"**

**The Lord is my light and salvation.  
Whom shall I fear? Of whom shall I be afraid?**

**I will wait on you, I will wait on you.  
I will trust in you, I will trust in you.**

**I will remain confident in this: I will see the goodness of the Lord**

God's Greeting  
Passing the Peace

## Reconciliation

Liturgist: You, Lord, showed favor to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

**All: You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins.**

Liturgist: You set aside your wrath and turned away from your anger.

**All: Restore us again, God our Savior, and put away any anger.  
Revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you.  
Show us your unfailing love, Lord, and grant us your salvation.**

*Psalm 85: 1-7 adapted*

### *Silent Confession and Lament*

Liturgist: Surely the Lord's salvation is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

**All: For love and faithfulness will meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring forth from the earth, and righteousness look down from heaven.**

Liturgist: The Lord will indeed give what is good. Righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps. *Psalm 85: 9-13 adapted*

**All Singing: 58 "Prepare the Way"**

**Prepare the way of the Lord. Prepare the way of the Lord,  
And all people will see the salvation of our God.**

Liturgist: Do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with us, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

**All: Therefore, let us live holy and godly lives as we wait eagerly for the day of God to come.** *II Peter 3: 8-9, 11-12 adapted*

## Proclamation

**All Singing: "I Don't Mind Waiting"**

**I don't mind waiting. I don't mind waiting.  
I don't mind waiting, on You Lord.**

Scripture: Mark 1: 1-8

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way"—  
"a voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
'Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.'"

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by

him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Minister: The Word of the Lord.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

Sermon: Repentant Waiting

**All Singing: 56 "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus"**

## Dedication

Prayers of the People

**All Singing: 482 "Soon and Very Soon"**

Benediction

### Worship Leaders

Prelude Organist:	Dora Diephouse
Advent Candles:	Mark and Sarah Rinckenberger
Pianist / Vocalist:	Erin Pacheco
Pianist / Vocalist:	David Walker
Flutist:	Sarah Rinckenberger
Liturgist:	RCM
Prayer:	RCM
Sound / Video:	Schuyler Roozeboom
Minister:	Roger Nelson

Hymns are from *Lift Up Your Hearts* (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013)  
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Text: Mark 1: 1-8  
Title: Repentant Waiting  
Date: 12.06.20  
Roger Allen Nelson

These are the opening lines of the Bible:

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep....*

These are the opening lines of the Gospel of Mark:

*The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare the way – a voice of one calling in the wilderness....*

The first verse of the first chapter of Genesis and the first verse of the first chapter of Mark both begin at the beginning.

They both start with God's activity.

They both start with God making the first move.

And they both start in places of darkness....

Genesis starts with creation – formless, empty and dark.

Mark starts with the wilderness – formless, empty and dark.

They both start with a space that is figuratively devoid of God.

For first century Palestinians the wilderness was a rocky-rugged-desolate-place, the habitat of demons and wild animals – not humans. And not unlike the deep dark waters, you were vulnerable to the chaos and danger that lurked under the surface. The wilderness was a place where all pretense or power was stripped away – a crucible of identity. Maybe because of all that it lays bare, the wilderness was a place where people discovered more fully who they were.

For example....

The Israelites wandered in the wilderness before they entered the Promised Land.

Jesus is led into the wilderness to confront Satan before he begins his public ministry.

There is something about the wilderness that is formative and clarifying – that exposes the truth.

And I love the wilderness.

For reasons that I don't fully understand when I see pictures of vast stretches of wilderness something in me wants to be in the middle of it. I don't want to see it from a distance; I want to traverse it. I want to run or ride or swim or paddle or hike or somehow enter into the wild of it. I know that for endurance athletes, part of the draw is the solitude and connection to nature, but part of it is also being laid bare by the wilderness – discovering who you are or what you can do.

Of course there are other kinds of wilderness....

2020 has felt like a wilderness. The loss of a loved one (living with grief) can feel like a wilderness. A long-term health struggle is its own wilderness. Depression is a lonely wilderness. The prospect of one more Zoom meeting can be a wearying wilderness. You get the idea. Wilderness is both literal and metaphorical. What wilderness do you know?

The Gospel of Mark starts in the wilderness.

And out of the wilderness comes a voice announcing repentance for the forgiveness of sins and heralding the coming of the Lord. Again, not unlike Genesis, a voice speaks out of and over the empty darkness. A single voice, in the beginning, that calls out the creation of a new world.

In the “Chronicles of Narnia” the “Magician’s Nephew” recounts the creative act. In that book C.S. Lewis imagines Aslan’s voice singing in the pre-creation darkness. It reads like this,

*In the darkness, something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing. It was very far away and Digory found it hard to decide from what direction it was coming. Sometimes it seemed to come from all directions at once. Sometimes he almost thought it was coming out of the earth beneath them. Its lower notes were deep enough to be the voice of the earth herself. There were no words. There was hardly even a tune. But it was, beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise he had ever heard. It was so beautiful he could hardly bear it . . . Then two wonders happened at the same moment. One was that the voice was suddenly joined by other voices; more voices than you could possibly count. They were in harmony with it, but far higher up the scale; cold, tingling, silvery voices. The second wonder was that the blackness overhead, all at once, was blazing with stars. They didn’t come out gently one by one as on a summer evening. One moment there had been nothing but darkness; next moment a thousand, thousand points of light leaped out . . . If you had seen and heard it, as Digory did, you would have felt quite certain that it was the First Voice, the deep one, which had made them appear and made them sing.*

Beautiful. Isn’t it?

Into the wilderness a lone voice sings a new world into being.

Into the wilderness a lone voice heralds the coming of a new world.

Dear friends, we often liken John the Baptist to an unpredictable street preacher hollering into a bullhorn and scaring away small children and the faint of heart. He doesn’t care who’s offended by his bark or bite. Barbara Brown Taylor calls him the “Doberman Pinscher of the Gospel.” She gives him that moniker because he sinks his teeth into us, shakes our souls, and won’t let us go. It’s no wonder that John the Baptist rarely appears in front yard nativity scenes; he’s frightening and the message of repentance is sobering. We’re happy to relegate him to the wilderness.

But...

What if the call to repentance is in fact a call to come home? What if John is actually heralding a call to human flourishing? A call that invites stars to come out and creation to sing. What if,

forged in the wilderness, the call to repentance is not harsh or frightening but joyful and freeing – calling a new world into being.

One of my oldest and dearest friends is an alcoholic and an addict. He's brilliant, broken, funny, complicated, a great father and grandfather, and he doesn't have an off-switch. Intermittently, for years and years, he was losing a raging-private-war with drink and drugs. Multiple times he sought treatment. He lived in a wretched lonely wilderness....

About 15 years ago, as he checked himself into another recovery program, he called to say that if he didn't get sober, he'd die. He committed to following the steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. He started with 90 meetings in 90 days. He kept going most every day after that, sometimes multiple meetings a day. He worked the 12 steps. He gave himself over to the AA community. He trusted his sponsor. And he did the hard work of facing the truth,  
telling the truth,  
living in light of the truth,  
and bearing witness to that truth with others.  
Thanks be to God.

The wilderness stripped my friend of all agency. He was finally left without resource or recourse. And in that powerlessness, he saw himself clearly. He could tell the truth about himself. He could find his place with others. And he moved closer to the fullness of who God created him to be. He was called home. Again, thanks be to God.

Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan write that the Hebrew word for repent was shaped by the Jewish experience of exile. They link it to the prophetic calls to “prepare the way of the Lord.” To repent was to return from exile to the place of God's presence. To repent was to follow the prepared way that leads out of separation and back to the One who made us and loves us.

The Hebrews that came out to the Jordan to see John the Baptist were living under the oppressive thumb of the Roman Empire. They knew both a history of exile and their own experience of living in a wilderness. Therefore, they heard “repent” as more of an invitation than a threat, they heard the prophetic cry to come home....

Repent. God calls. Come home.  
Repent. God calls. Walk into freedom.

Look, I don't know what wilderness you're living in. Living in the uncertainty of a pandemic and the unsettledness of our political landscape seems wilderness enough. I don't mean that to be cheap or cheeky; many of you also know a wilderness that's lonely and overwhelming. So, I offer this with humility and hesitancy. I hope/pray that it's helpful.

Our question this Advent season is: How then do we wait?

Last week (Advent 1) we suggested that we wait for God's coming with an apocalyptic longing. We watch and wait for the rooster to crow and God to put this world to rights. This morning (Advent 2) we acknowledge that we wait in the wilderness.

But, whatever our wilderness, let us listen for the voice crying out a new creation. Let us listen for that voice calling us home.

And may the wilderness strip us of all pretense and power that we might know the truth about ourselves. May the wilderness cause us to turn away from the lies that are told to us and that we tell ourselves, and may we turn toward the fullness of who we're created to be.

That process of truth telling (or repentance) may require help – the help of the church, the help of a small group of friends, the help of a therapist, etc, etc.

But even as we learn to tell the truth of who we are, may we also come to know, deep in our bones, that we are loved and accepted (without exception) by God in Christ. And as we live into that reality, as we turn toward home, may catch a glimpse of the new creation that is being called into being.

*A voice calling in the wilderness, Prepare the way for the Lord....*

Even so, come Lord Jesus.

Amen.