December 6, 2020 Advent 2 – B

St. Gabriels - Titusville

Isaiah 40:1-11; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

O Lord, we pray, speak in this place, in the calming of our minds and in the longing of our hearts, by the words of my lips and in the thoughts that we form. Speak, O Lord, for your servants listen. Amen. (please be seated)

Some time ago (1996), the staff at the Bridger Wilderness Area in the Teton National Forest in Wyoming received the following responses on comment cards from hikers on their trails. These are actual responses!

Trails need to be wider so people can walk while holding hands.

Trails need to be reconstructed. Please avoid building trails that go uphill.

Too many bugs and leeches and spiders and spider webs. Please spray the wilderness to rid the areas of these pests.

Chair lifts need to be in some places so that we can get to wonderful views without having to hike to them.

A small deer came into my camp and stole my jar of pickles. Is there a way I can get reimbursed?

Escalators would help on steep uphill sections.

A MacDonald's would be nice at the trailhead.

The places where trails do not exist are not well marked.

Too many rocks in the mountains. (Mike Neifert, Light and Life, February 1997, p. 27; www.PreachingToday.com)

Can you believe it? I think those people forgot where they were. Well, sometimes on life’s journey, we have similar complaints. We forget that life is not a paved highway to heaven where we can zip along in air conditioned vehicles and all traffic lights are green. More often than not, it’s more like a wilderness, mountain trail. Sure, there are beautiful vistas along the way, but often the trail gets steep and hard.

I don’t even want to think what comment cards on 2020 might contain. My guess is that not too many of them could be read in church!

So what are we to do in this journey called life, especially in light of all that’s happened of late? Complain about the hard times? Pine away for the old days – return to *normal – whatever that means?* Or is there a better way to enjoy the trip?

Our scripture readings today present a map for us, encourage stronger preparation and offer a straighter path.

Today, is the 2nd Sunday of Advent. We began our worship with preparing our hearts for the Lord, by repenting of our sin, confessing to both God and our community. In the names of *Hope and Peace* the 1st and 2nd candles of our Advent Wreath have been lit.

Shalom is God’s peace made alive in the life of the believer. Shalom guides, comforts, quiets, restores and sustains, regardless of life circumstances. Shalom is found nowhere apart from God, it straightens our path…and leads us to a deeper, transforming faith.

[pause]

From the **Prophet Isaiah** we hear: *Comfort, O comfort my people …and a voice that cries out: Prepare the way of the Lord…make straight a highway for our God!* The poetic images used by the Prophet are not literal prophecies of what will happen to mountains, but of what will happen to **human hearts**. For only if you truly believe God renews hearts can you become a herald of glad tidings!

Isaiah interweaves images of God’s strength and tenderness: *his strong arm rules* and in those same arms, he gathers the lambs…

Our epistle…Peter’s personal, intimate letter to his beloved…to us, addresses the very thing we continually grapple with: the delay of Christ’s return. Peter reasons that what looks like a “delay” is instead *God’s generous patience giving us time to repent, lest we “perish.”* Our generous God, patiently awaits our repentance so that we do not perish!

Assured of God’ love, we need to turn the page over and recognize that Love requires that we do not shy from the truth: behavior has consequences: we have time to repent, and that time is here and now. Peter urges us to consider, in going forward, “what sort of persons *ought* we to be?”

Mark begins his Gospel Account with a bold proclamation: the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mark doesn’t mince words, he gets right to the heart of the matter and the heart is **Jesus Christ the Son of God**!

Then he begins his account of the life of Jesus Christ, not in a manger, but in the desert where John lives out Isaiah’s centuries old prophecy of the messenger who is sent to “prepare the way of the Lord.”

[John the Baptist, one of the Christian Scripture’s most colorful characters, got people’s attention with that message: “Prepare ye the way!” We quote him as saying “repent,” but the word he used wasn’t quite so puritanical. John didn’t call for self-incriminating scruples but for what [**Sr. Mary McGlone**](https://lectiotube.com/sr-mary-mcglone-csj/)refers to as a **radical open-mindedness**. The Greek word is *metanoia*, coming from *meta* which means “beyond” and *nous* which refers “to the mind.”

Thus, *metanoia* is a call to go beyond our typical or “normal” mindset. It speaks of a change in our vision of life that will brings about a transformation of the way we live. *Even in these dark days of COVID and isolation!*

The Gospel tells us that everybody was flocking to John at the Jordan to confess their sins and go through John’s cold-water, cleansing dunk. If we imagine that scene with the excesses of crowds and enthusiasm Mark describes, we will get quite a picture. The crowd’s confession of sin wasn’t at all what we think of as a recitation of transgressions — and there was nothing private about it. It was a communal and enthusiastic public demonstration in which groups of people got excited about the idea that life could be much better than it was. Their confession said, “We’ve settled for less, but no more!”

*An enthusiastic confession? I wonder what that might feel like. Isn’t that what the world needs to day? In this time and place?!*

The corollary to that confession, what brought it about and what it was intended to lead to, was a dream about how things *could* be. Isaiah offered people a vision of a world without divisions and barriers symbolized by valleys and mountains. Everything that plagued people, families and nations would be smoothed out. The whole world would see how good God is. All peoples would learn that the power of God is the power of love, that God enters history not as a warrior but like a shepherd. *One with strong arms to guide, correct and tenderly care for his sheep.*

*What if we decided, here and now to live into that dream?!*

Mark [] cuts to the quick and says John preached three things: repentance, forgiveness and the coming of one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit: *I have given you water, but he will serve you the wine of the Spirit!*

 Mark *in his economy of words, doesn’t give us the details, he leaves it to us to figure it out. To whom do we need to repent? To whom do we need to seek forgiveness from or to offer forgiveness to? How do I prepare my heart for the re-birth of Jesus?*

The Second Sunday of Advent invites us to *step away from all the whirling, swirling things around us and truly envision what God is calling us to – to enter into the Good News.*

Isaiah, Peter and Mark offer us a vision of what life can be like. We are created with the potential to share divine life, to share the joy of being part of a humanity at peace, smoothing out what divides us and rejoicing in the multiple ways our differen*ces []* can incarnate the love of God. We will never make it happen if we don’t first *open our minds and hearts*. The call to repent is a call to let go of our puny expectations. The promise of forgiveness tells us that God will never condemn us to remain trapped in the selfishness we have chosen. There is always more possibility.

[] the promise of Christ’s gift of the Holy Spirit tells us that [] the glory of the Lord can be revealed in us and among us *if we []* open our minds and hearts and prepare the way of the Lord. **©2017 National Catholic Reporter. All Rights Reserved.**[**Sr. Mary McGlone**](https://lectiotube.com/sr-mary-mcglone-csj/)**is a Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet. …modified and adapted, additions are in italic]**

Sue Monk Kidd, the author of the best seller *The Secret of Bees,* is also well known for her books on spirituality such as *When the Heart Waits.*  In this book, she tells of how she would prepare for Christmas. In early December, she would sit by the wooden nativity set clustered under their Christmas tree and think over the last year of her life. She would think deeply about Christmas and the coming of Jesus.

She recalls her visit to a monastery, a couple of weeks before Christmas. Walking outside she greeted a monk with, "Merry Christmas." The monk's response caught her off guard. "May Christ be born in you," he replied.

At the time she was unsure of what he meant, but years later, sitting beside the Christmas tree, she felt the impact of his words, realizing that while Advent is a time of spiritual preparation, it is also a time of transformation.

It is "discovering our soul and letting Christ be born from the waiting heart."

In this season of Advent, in hope and peace let us prepare the way so that our hearts and minds will be open to the transformative power of the Holy Spirit that once again, Christ may be born in each of us. Amen