**Sermon**

We gather on this 2nd Sunday of Advent and are asked to wait.

Waiting in kind of our theme each advent. If you are around kids you can witness their active waiting this whole month as they wait for this day of gift receiving and family parties. (ex: Girls club highs & lows –“Xmas 19 days away!!!”)

In church we are invited to a different kind of waiting. (not 24 little chocolates till we get to the big gifts, not even a countdown to the xmas eve candlelight services that fills me w/ xmas spirit) but invited to wait and wonder with the prophets for the vision of a world of radical reversals

* *“every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low*”

In the Gospel of Mark, Isaiah’s cry is echoed there.

Most scholars believed Mark was the 1st gospel recorded around 70 CE,

* the writers of Mark feared that those who were eye witnesses to the life and works of Jesus would die before anyone prepared a written testimony about Christ’s life.
* So Mark wrote in a hurry, giving a bare-bones account of Christ’s life, death and resurrection.
* He wrote to a Gentile/Roman audience who didn’t know the customs and practices of the Jews, so he just told the stories…
* In this first gospel there are no shepherds, no magi, no birth story, not even any theological reflections as in John.

Mark, however, begins this way:

*The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, (Mark 1:1)*

To us this may look like a throw away line, just a formality to get on to the story. But to the original audience it is packed with a lot in those few words.

When I preached about Romans, in the spring, I explained the counter- cultural images and language that Paul used. And Mark here is doing the same thing.

“*The beginning of the good news*” -this is imperial language:

good news was something that the Empire regularly proclaimed = good news/gospel were the proclamations of who was conquered, battles won, revolts suppressed. But here Mark proclaims another kind of good news.

*“The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ”* another clue:

A word for anointed one, used for kings/rulers, not just Jesus

Etymology of Christ: in 250 BCE OT was translated from Hebrew to Greek called the Septuagint. NT was written 300 years later but also in Greek.

Hebrew had the word “Messiah” (Hebrew: Mashiyach -Mesh-e-yak)

Translated by the meaning of “anointed one” to Christos

But then when we translated the bible into other languages, we didn’t translate Christos by its meaning, but because it became a title, kept it for it’s sound (transliteration, not translation)

Now we also took the Hebrew OT and translated it to English, but not first through Greek, so we don’t see Christ in the OT, just in the new.

Anyway, for Mark’s audience, this title told them that Jesus was a kingly figure.

*“The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God,”*

And the next words “*Son of God”* said not just any king. SoG borrowed from RE, since the Romans believed that when an Emperor died he became a god, so the current emperor -his son, was literally the SoG.

So again, Mark is proclaiming a different kind of king and a different kind of empire.

Also heralded by a different kind of messenger.

Today our focus turns to John the Baptist.

Normally if a message was coming from a king, they sent on a messenger on ahead, and they would make their proclamations at the city gates or town square or steps of the temple (someplace central)

Where is John the Baptist? In the wilderness!!!

We have this weird dude, eating weird food, in weird clothing, out in the desert.

-and yet he’s not there alone.

John The Baptist had been preaching in the wilderness for years, wearing camel skins, never shaving, eating locust and wild honey – anything he could find in the wilderness.

He was a recluse, someone on the edge of normal society.

He preached throughout of repentance, and to make ready, make ready the way of the Lord, make his path straight. Announcing to all that the King was coming.

He challenged them to repent -turn around, and embrace the Son of God Jesus, not the son of God Caeser.

He is out there declaring something is going to change.

He is the eye witness, the one to tell all of the coming Messiah.

And he’s not out there alone. Crowds of people have found him, it says, drawn to what he has to say, being baptized to the faith he calls them to.

And so Mark uses Isaiah’s words to describe him:

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%201&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-24215d)]

who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

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

Isaiah was speaking to a people who had been enduring the pain of foreign occupation for a long time.

They had live thru generations of bondage and oppression

(Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians,... the Romans)

For the average Israelite it must have felt like their servitude would go on forever!

But Isaiah’s promise was of comfort. *“Comfort, comfort, o my people”*

*Ends in vs 31 “but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;*

*they shall mount up with wings like eagles;*

*they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*

God had not forgotten them,

That was and still is God’s promise

The experience of darkness, servitude and occupation has by no means been eradicated from our world even still.

And so, we too are asked to continue to wait, continue to hold onto this vision that God will make things right.

But what are we to do in the waiting?

Christmas for some: is a time when you get wrapped up in the feasting and family, gift-giving and child-like magic of Santa and angels and wisemen, decorated trees and caroling choirs, and mix of the sacred and the profane.

For others: Christmas can be a lonely place, like watching from outside the store window, when others are experiencing the magic and you only watch.

So what do we do in the waiting, those on both side of that experience?

John calls us to prepare.

But I want to push that a little further, not just to hear the call to prepare, but to be the call.

It doesn’t take much looking through our world to find the darkness. The whole world is aching over what is happening right now in the Middle East.

The war in Ukraine continues on.

Look around our own country and we find injustices, decades-long boil water advisories, violence against Indigenous women, opiate addictions, poverty and racism and bigotry and hatred.

Maybe we must become the ones:

Crying in the wilderness!

Against evil and injustice!

Along with John the Baptist.

We are no messiahs, we cannot save the world, but what we can do is be like John the Baptist.

* Bare witness to the one who can save the world
* To the teachings and life lessons of Jesus of Nazareth

We want a nice little christmas card image of baby J in the manger, but who is this J? John is telling us that, Jesus was coming to flip all they knew about rules and power upside down.

This is a Jesus who is going to say “you have heard it said” (all the things that make sense to us)

* Eye for an eye/ tooth for tooth/ love your neighbour, hate enemy
* = J says no, love. you have to love one another
* Even your enemies, even the rejected, even the people that everyone in their right minds you shouldn’t be with, even them, invite them into your house for dinner.

When Jesus came, he gave us the instructions to get to God’s vision of equity and justice.

Waiting at Advent is a reminder that the kingdom of God came to this earth at J’s birth.

* Not in some other world
* But in this world
* Doing the work of God / the Kingdom of G is here in our world

So perhaps, amidst our gift wrapping and cookie making, our franticness and urgency, this Advent let us now and forever bear witness to Gods kingdom come

– let us now bear witness to the one who calls us out of the wilderness to a life of love, forgiveness, joy, grace and justice for all.

-let our actions be something that embodies that love of the other, that justice for the oppressed, the lowly lifted up

-The good news is not that we get to have a party and gifts on Dec 25, the good news is that the kingdom of God has come, where the road is made straight, the uneven ground made level.

Advent waiting is to bare witness to that, to give evidence, to confirm the happenings of the Spirit of God at work in our world.

(If this was a bible study, I would ask you all to share about where you witness God at work, in repairing lives, righting injustices, loving the broken

If you were a Millennial audience, I’d say you should post on IG, not what party or new item.. But where you witness God’s vision of justice and love happening in our world)

There is enough darkness in our world, already, lets point out the light.

Waiting at Advent is heeding John’s words, that Christ has come and we bare witness to that coming.

And for that, my friends, we should all celebrate, not only this Advent and Christmas, but throughout the year, the kingdom came at Christmas and the kingdom is here.

\*Much credit for this sermon comes from The Pulpit Fiction Podcast #570 and a sermon by Rev Deniray Mueller “Are we wandering in the darkness?” on SermonCentral.com