

Isaiah 40:1-11

Mark 1:1-8

2 Peter 3:8-15a

“Steadfast love and faithfulness have met together;
righteousness and peace have kissed.” AMEN!

(Sing)

“I said yeah, yeah (yeah, yeah)
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

The waiting is the hardest part
Every day you get one more yard
You take it all in faith
You take it to the heart
The waiting is the hardest part”

The great Tom Petty, may he Rest In Peace,
brings the familiar advent
theme of waiting to us in song.

But instead of apocalyptic messaging
from Mark today, we’re carried back
to the beginning of that gospel and
the beginning of Jesus’ ministry.

These first lines set the stage
for Mark’s entire gospel:

The beginning of
the good news of Jesus Christ,
the Son of God.

There isn't a birth narrative for Jesus in Mark.

The story begins simply in the wilderness
with a messenger paraphrasing the Isaiah
text about preparing the way of the Lord.

We pause on our Advent Journey this year
to consider John the baptizer's message
of preparation.

We might learn from his urgency,
an urgency that runs through Mark, but
scratch our heads not quite sure what it is
we are urgently preparing for...

we just know that, whatever it is...
it is RIGHT NOW!

The fast paced language in Mark wastes
no time because something is beginning and
a message must be proclaimed:

"This is the good news of Jesus Christ."

To all those who listened yesterday, all who
are listening today and all who will listen tomorrow,
John the baptizer proclaims
"Here is your God,

in the form of Jesus.” (Pause)

But, before we go to that shocking truth,
we must consider this messenger.

John offered a baptism of repentance for
the forgiveness of sins and as we get to know
this unique individual, even
though his descriptions by
the gospel writer are brief,
the words reveal important truths.

John the baptizer is “Elijah-like.”

Prophetic in appearance and behavior, but why are
we told about his diet?

It could be as simple as he ate food that was
provided by God.

Protein and wild honey.

Maybe it is that simple.

Or maybe they are symbolic -
recognizing that locust were pests that God
sent to destroy the crops of an enemy

or called upon locust to ravage fields

when the people disobedient.

The prophet's eating of these pests
takes on new meaning then.

We could have reason to see that
something new was happening...

this prophet was eating the agents of God's wrath.

In the wilderness - outside of the land of promise,
the land of "milk and honey," are words
used to describe the promised land.

John the baptizer was consuming
locusts and honey to stay alive in order
to prepare the people,
consuming them to show something new
was beginning.

Then we have the important reference
to another that is coming.

Now we know who that other is, right?

Of course we do!

The "other" coming is Jesus.

Our Advent message today is the same.

Jesus is coming and those paying attention
are excited and hopeful about it.

Those paying the attention are confessing sins.

We are hungry for Christ.

Caught in this tension of the waiting,
we do well in recognizing what John has
to say to us:

The one more powerful than anyone
we'll ever know is on the way to us, and
we are not worthy to untie the strap
that holds the sandal to the feet.

What a reference to the awesome power of
this Jesus that is like no one we've ever known.

I wonder if those multitudes pressing in
to be baptized by John paused at his words
about worthiness.

I would have.

Would I even want to be baptized
by someone with such power?

I may want the baptism for the forgiveness of sins
but what would be required of me
to be baptized by this other One
who is coming?

I might even ask to “wait”
a little longer for that baptism. (Pause)

Followers of God,
this is exactly our baptism.

We stand at the threshold between heaven and earth.

The prophet announced that God is
on a highway to us.

We don't stretch our imaginations too far
to see that God is on the highway to hell.

Hell on earth, that is.

When I consider images of hell from Dante or
other great artists... the pictures revealed are
torment and suffering.

Back-stabbing, gossip, “othering,”
greed, mistrust, even murder -

that is so prevalent in our world
makes part of this life,
much like hell on earth.

To which we cry, “Come, Lord Jesus, come.” (Pause)

Behold your God, in the form of Jesus.

In what ways are we beholding God,
in the form of Jesus?

It's not in the injustice of FSU not going
to a Bowl Championship.

How misguided to listen to politicians raise
such calls for “justice” when people
without shelter, food, and mental health care
suffer in the shadows of the Capitol.

Their voices cry out in the wilderness. (Pause)

Now, I know that pastors don't need
to have all the right answers, and I have
as few as any.

But there's an expectation from you all
that pastors have something to say.

And those words will have stinging effects

sometimes and comforting effects
at other times.

Believe it when I say,
I feel them both, too.

The comfort and the sting.

And you all know me, I'm alright with you
knowing I don't have it all put together.

We are mature enough to accept that truth...
it is after all God who is in control.

The highway God takes to all people,
in the form of Jesus, means that
we can acknowledge that not everyone
will find the gospel message attractive.

Some will prefer war over peace,
division over unity, some will prefer
keeping hate and avoiding love.

But our job, yours and mine, is this...
to adopt different preferences.

To point folks in the right direction.

To pray that God blesses them

while changing us.

To tell of peace for Jesus is near.

AMEN!