

Advent 2 B
Mark 1:1-8
December 10, 2023

“Only the Beginning”

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*The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,*

*“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.’”*

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

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“Tell me the weight of a snowflake,” a coalmouse asked a wild dove.

“Nothing more than nothing,” was the answer.

“In that case, I must tell you a marvelous story,” the coalmouse said.

“I sat on the branch of a fir, close to its trunk, when it began to snow-not heavily, not in a raging blizzard-no, just like a dream, without a sound and without any violence. Since I did not have anything better to do, I counted the snowflakes settling on the twigs and needles of my branch. Their number was exactly 3,741,952. When the 3,741,953rd dropped onto the branch, nothing more than nothing, as you say-the branch broke off.”

Having said that, the coalmouse flew away.

The dove, since Noah’s time an authority on the matter, thought about the story for a while, and finally said to herself, “Perhaps there is only one person’s voice lacking for peace to come to the world.”¹

~o~

On this second Sunday of Advent, as we light a candle for peace at a time when peace seems overtaken by corporate profits, calm is exchanged for the chaos of pre-Christmas preparations, serenity is overshadowed by uncertainty, and goodwill among all is supplanted by suspicion and mistrust, the almost prophetic words of the wild dove in this wonderful fable cut through the din and straight to the heart: “Perhaps there *is* only one person’s voice lacking for peace to come to the world.” Is it my voice that’s lacking? Is it yours? Is it ours?

Today’s text from Mark’s gospel was written in a time when real peace was indeed in short supply in ancient Israel. Most scholars agree that Mark’s gospel was written just after 70 C.E. when Rome destroyed the Jewish Temple and much of Jerusalem in a successful effort to put down a rebellion against the empire. At the time of Mark’s writing, Israel was

¹ Joseph Jaworski. [Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership](#), Oakland: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2011.

ruled by Herod Agrippa II, a Rome-approved ruler, and was subject to Roman authority and Roman oppression.

Mark's author begins with the words: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Then, they go on to quote a familiar passage from the prophet Isaiah. As it was in the days of Mark's composition, peace was in short supply for the people of Israel over 500 years earlier when Isaiah's hopeful words were written from exile in ancient Babylon.

Today, as we light a candle for peace, peace seems as illusive now as it was when both Mark and Isaiah's authors penned the words we just heard. War rages in Ukraine; fighting continues in Gaza; factions galvanize here at home for what will likely become a fierce battle for the White House next year and for control of Congress; blocs clash on how best to deal with everything from the climate crisis, to the economy, to public education. Despite the prophet's hopeful words, peace is as illusive now as it was when they wrote them and when Mark's author reiterated them.

But I'd like to draw us back to the very first words of Mark's gospel. The author writes that this is "[t]he beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ." Not the end. Not the final product. No, Mark's gospel is just the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ. The rest is waiting to be written, lived into being, experienced. Mark's "beginning of the good news" ends in the final chapter when the women flee the empty tomb in terror and amazement and tell no one. The telling is for us to do in our words and in our actions.

The truth is that Advent isn't just concerned with the past—about waiting for a baby to be born in a Bethlehem stable. That's already happened. Advent is concerned with the future—waiting for hope, peace, love, and joy to be born in us, for the sake of bearing that same hope, peace, love, and joy in our world!

In other words, as one commentator said it, "*we* are what we have been waiting for." The peace that we long for must be of *our* making – Jesus

already did his part! We are called to “*be* Emmanuel, the God with humanity, *be* the second coming of Christ, [*build*] the new heaven and the new earth.” Christmas promises peace for our hearts, but Advent waits for peace that we build with our hands. “The good news this Advent is that all this time, while we thought we were waiting on God, it was in fact God that was waiting on us. And God is waiting still.”²

And so, we return to the words of one particularly enlightened wild dove: “Perhaps there is only one person’s voice lacking for peace to come to the world.” Is it my voice that’s lacking? Is it yours? Is it ours?

This Advent, even as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus in a Bethlehem stable, may hope, peace, joy and love be born in us for the sake of the world that God waits for *us* to speak into being, to love into being, to build with our very own hands. Amen.

² David Henson. “What Are We Waiting For?” Patheos.com, November 28, 2011: <https://www.patheos.com/resources/additional-resources/2011/11/reflections-on-the-second-sunday-of-advent-david-henson-11-28-2011>.