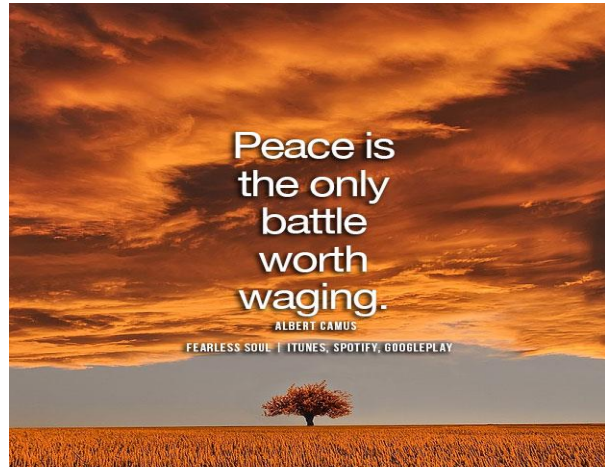


DECEMBER 10, 2023
SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (PEACE)



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***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP: (Inspired by Isaiah 40)**

One: A voice cries out declaring God's presence.
Comfort, O Comfort my people, says God.

All: We come preparing the way of the Lord.

Together, we actively wait for God's peace.

One: A voice cries out declaring God's equity.
Valleys shall be lifted and Hills be made low.

All: We come to make straight in the desert a highway.

Together, we're pressing toward God's peace.

One: A voice cries out declaring steadfastness.

Grass withers, flowers fade, but God's word stands forever.

All: We lift up our voices with strength and good tidings. Together, we carry out God's peace.

***INVOCATION:**

Spirit of God, who dwells within our hearts,
Wean it from that which aims to separate us from you.

In this moment of collective worship

Take the dimness of our souls away.

Let us seek you. Let us find you.

Teach us to feel that you are always nigh

As we lift up our voices with strength to worship you.

Amen.

***CALL TO CONFESSION:**

God is patient with us, not wanting any to perish. Yet we have turned away from holiness and godliness. We have chosen to fit into society rather than give leadership for a new day. Let the church confess its failures.

***UNISON PRAYER OF TRANSFORMATION**

We come to you, Creator, not asking for an empty or entitled peace; We come to you asking that you call us to kneel. Remind us to dig deeper to the wells of truth. Help us see beneath the surface level arguments and beyond viral news clips. Embolden us to be the

revolutionaries you have called us to be so that all injustice might be eradicated and peace that surpasses understanding may reign. Amen. Silence

***ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:**

God speaks tenderly to us and assures us that our debt has been paid, our sins forgiven, our paths made straight. God's glory is waiting to burst into the midst of all who accept the good news. Surely our salvation is at hand. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. Enjoy the baptism of the Holy Spirit!

SCRIPTURE LESSONS: Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort for God's people

40 Comfort, comfort my people! says your God.

² Speak compassionately to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her compulsory service has ended, that her penalty has been paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins!

³ A voice is crying out: "Clear the LORD's way in the desert! Make a level highway in the wilderness for our God! ⁴ Every valley will be raised up, and every mountain and hill will be flattened. Uneven ground will become level, and rough terrain a valley plain.

⁵ The LORD's glory will appear, and all humanity will see it together; the LORD's mouth has commanded it."

⁶ A voice was saying: "Call out!" And another said, "What should I call out?" All flesh is grass; all its loyalty is

like the flowers of the field. ⁷ The grass dries up and the flower withers when the LORD's breath blows on it. Surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass dries up; the flower withers, but our God's word will exist forever. ⁹ Go up on a high mountain, messenger Zion! Raise your voice and shout, messenger Jerusalem! Raise it; don't be afraid; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"

¹⁰ Here is the LORD God, coming with strength, with a triumphant arm, bringing his reward with him and his payment before him.

¹¹ Like a shepherd, God will tend the flock; he will gather lambs in his arms and lift them onto his lap. He will gently guide the nursing ewes.

EPISTLE LESSON: 2 Peter 3:8-15a

⁸ Don't let it escape your notice, dear friends, that with the Lord a single day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a single day. ⁹ The Lord isn't slow to keep his promise, as some think of slowness, but he is patient toward you, not wanting anyone to perish but all to change their hearts and lives. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will pass away with a dreadful noise, the elements will be consumed by fire, and the earth and all the works done on it will be exposed.

¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be? You must live holy and godly lives, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming day

of God. Because of that day, the heavens will be destroyed by fire and the elements will melt away in the flames. ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

Preparing for Christ's coming in judgment

¹⁴ Therefore, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found by him in peace—pure and faultless. ¹⁵ Consider the patience of our Lord to be salvation, just as our dear friend and brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him,

***GOSPEL LESSON: Mark 1:1-8**

Beginning of good news

1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God's Son, ² happened just as it was written about in the prophecy of Isaiah:

Look, I am sending my messenger before you.

He will prepare your way,

³ *a voice shouting in the wilderness:*

*“Prepare the way for the Lord;
make his paths straight.”*

John's preaching

⁴ John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. ⁵ Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by

John as they confessed their sins. ⁶ John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He announced, “One stronger than I am is coming after me. I'm not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: “Anticipation and Preparation”

Advent has been described as a time of anticipation and preparation. The cynic in me thinks, “Yes. The children do all the anticipating and the parents and adults do all the preparation; the shopping, the wrapping, the decorating, the baking, and on and on.”

Our Gospel lesson today introduces to us John (the Baptizer). The Advent season has no more appropriate voice than that of John. John was the prophet that all Jewish people had been waiting for. The last prophet they had had was 300 years before. They thought perhaps God had left them.

The author of the Gospel of Mark introduces his writing as “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” As far as we know, this is the first use of the word *gospel* (good news) to refer to a written account of the narrative about Jesus Christ.

The Gospel of Mark was written first of the four gospels we have today. Scholars can tell because the

books of Matthew and Luke use much of what Mark had written, some times, word for word. The anticipation of a Messiah was hundreds of years old so that wasn't a new idea for the people. Although the coming of the Christ is a new thing God is doing, it is not without a past. John's preaching is news, good news but, it has a history, a memory. Memory is the soil in which hope survives, and that which is remembered is the promise of a faithful God.

It is John who bursts upon the scene creating new excitement, stirring hearts, and gathering all Judea and Jerusalem to the Jordan River to hear his message of repentance, confess their sins, and receive baptism and forgiveness of sin. John is the beginning of the Gospel, for it is his dynamic ministry that prepares the people for the one mightier than he. His popularity and influence made an impact upon political and religious leaders as well as the common people. How does one account for his popularity and influence? The curious came to the Jordan River, of course, for John was an unusual man, and the nostalgic, too, for the image of Elijah, the prophet we can read about in the Old Testament in the book of 2 Kings. This image must have stirred longing for the good old days. But basic to the power of his ministry were the two themes of his preaching: the Messiah is at the door, and repentance is essential as preparation to receive him. In other words, he gave his listeners hope, and he gave them a way to enter into that hope.

That is the message John the Baptizer gives us, too. Repent. Change the way we think. Get rid of greed, and judgment of others. Turn around the unhelpful actions we do.

If we don't want to miss the Messiah coming to save us, we need to do our homework; our anticipation and preparation. Amen

PRAYER FOR PEACE IN TIMES OF WAR:

For the political instability in Haiti—

May a peace come soon for those who have been suffering and surviving for centuries.

God, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

For the civil conflict in Libya—

May a peace bring reconciliation and restoration.

God, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

For those fighting for liberation

Who have endured years of occupation,

Who have demanded that colonialism cease,

And reparations rise up from the ashes—

May the powers and principalities realize the errors of their ways.

God, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

For the violence right here in our backyards

Fueled by decades of educational and economic neglect,

Racism, classism, and ableism,

Powered by political dysfunction,

Aided by the worship of guns—
May peace come quickly through us, by us, and for us.

For Ukraine, for Gaza and Palestine and all the cities
who have experienced shootings and for so many
more—

God, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

**THE LORD'S PRAYER: Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be
done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our
daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our
debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us
from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and
the glory forever. Amen.**

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY

We believe in the God of righteousness, and God
believes in us to carry forth the mission of loving and
caring for community. Let us now share our gifts and
resources so that we may continue to walk humbly with
God and with neighbors.

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION:**

We dedicate these gifts that have been shared for the
fortification of the beloved community. Let these gifts
usher peace into this world and signal to the people that
God is with us. Amen.

BENEDICTION (Inspired by Psalm 85)

Send us forth to become to peace we wish to see in this
world and as we go,
May Steadfast love and faithfulness meet
May Righteousness and peace embrace
May Faithfulness spring up from the ground
And May righteousness look down from the sky.
Amen.