

The Way of Patience

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

^ 2nd Advent Yr B – Peace

- ^ We are now in the season of Advent. It is a time of preparation and anticipation. The question that surrounds the season is one we must confront every year in this time: Are we able to, and Can we prepare for the coming of the Lord, and if so, how?
- ^ The question is not without theological problems. Back in the early days of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, a woman named Anne Hutchison got in trouble for advocating a form of hyper-Calvinism which said there is no way whatsoever we can prepare for the coming of God.
 - ^ No prayer, no action, no thought can anticipate the entrance of God into the soul of a person. Further, to advocate any sort of action in that direction is contrary to the will of God.
- ^ Anne took to disrupting church services of pastors who disagreed with her group of followers. This of course led to her being confronted by the leaders of the religious community of MBC.
 - ^ Anne held her own when confronted. In fact, she argued with the very best theological minds of the day for almost 42 hours. Exhausted, under stress from questioning and very hungry, she admitted in an unguarded moment that the Holy Spirit had spoken to her directly about these things.
 - ^ That was all the leaders needed to hear and she was banished to the theological backwater of Rhode Island.
- ^ Aside from the occasional swing toward inaction of spirit and soul that happens in Christian history, it is a well-established understanding from the very beginnings of the Christian faith that we can indeed do things to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord into our being and world.
- ^ In our readings from Isaiah and Mark today, we can see a couple ways to prepare ourselves together and individually for the coming of the Messiah, for the celebration once again of the coming of Christ into our world, the advent of God as human into our lives.

- ^ **First**, in order to prepare for the coming of the Lord, we must hear the announcement of the coming of the Lord.
 - ^ This is the meaning of the highway in the wilderness Isaiah speaks of.
 - ^ The voice that Isaiah hears says: **Isaiah 40:3** *In the wilderness clear a way for the LORD; construct in the desert a road for our God.*
 - ^ Mark quotes Isaiah here in Mark 1, referring to the coming of Jesus.
 - ^ Highway, here, is more appropriately translated as thoroughfare or superhighway – a straight path with no blocks in it from Babylon to Jerusalem.
 - ^ This way of announcing is the way kings were announced upon arriving to the wood before a city. It is something like, “Make way and clear all blocks in the path for the coming of a truly important person.”
 - ^ And, as an aside, it is also the meaning of the word “gospel”. In Greek, “gospel” is “evangelion” or Good News. Good News is what was proclaimed whenever the empire or the emperor won a major battle.
 - ^ Obviously, in order to clear the way and get out of the way for the coming Lord we have to hear the call, the announcement, the voice.
 - ^ God is building the highway, so our hearing of the call is of God’s design and desire.
 - ^ In other words, in the case of Isaiah and Mark both, the announcement is meant for all to hear, and for us to listen closely to what is coming.
- ^ **Second**, once we have listened closely and heard the announcement, we must respond to what we have heard in order to prepare ourselves.
 - ^ God has made the first move. We must keep this always in mind. We want to be the prime mover, the sole actor, the one who moves and makes the decisions relative to our relationship with God – but we can’t and we are not the ones who make the first move. God is.
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^ **What then is our response to be?**

- ^ God's call, God's Good News and proclamation, is a move which demands a response from each of us individually and as a community of followers of Christ.
- ^ Our response, at least from today's readings and in relation to Advent, is Patience.
- ^ **Patience** is probably the hardest aspect of our preparation for the Coming of the Lord, the return of the Messiah, the season of Advent.
 - ^ There are two aspects to patience – ours and God's
 - ^ **Our patience**
 - ^ I am terrible at patience. I do not like waiting and if it looks like it will be a long wait for a movie, for seeing someone important, for an appointment, I will likely leave rather than wait.
 - ^ This may be that my first real exercise in patience happened when I was very young. My father left for VietNam when I was only 3 and a half. I remember the call coming in for him to leave. I remember watching the news with my mother, knowing my father was where people were being killed. I remember listening to the reel-to-reel tapes my father sent home with stories for me and news of what was going on over there. My mom went to meet my Dad in Taiwan and they spent a month together before returning home. I remember waiting in the airport that day with my grandparents.
 - ^ I hate waiting.
 - ^ When I was in High School, I made the mistake of adding up all the time I spent waiting for things, and I found the answer to be incredibly depressing. I wondered how anyone accomplished anything if they wasted so much time waiting for things in their lives.
 - ^ But God's people know that waiting is a difficult thing, otherwise we wouldn't be told

^ **Psalm 130:5-6** *I rely on the LORD, I rely on him with my whole being; I wait for his assuring word. ⁶ I yearn for the Lord, more than watchmen do for the morning, yes, more than watchmen do for the morning.*

^ **Psalm 27:14** *Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!*

^ **Galatians 5:5** *For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.*

^ Patience is a part of our walk of faith. We develop patience by

^ Seeing a world that is not the way it is meant to be

^ Isn't John the Baptist calling the people to not only repent and be forgiven, but also to open themselves to the possibility that a better world is coming?

^ That is, after all, the promise of the coming of the Messiah, isn't it, for Jew and Christian alike.

^ **Mark 1**

^ **God's Patience**

^ Developing a taste for patience is difficult, but there is another aspect of patience. It is the aspect that Peter speaks of in our reading today.

^ **2 Peter 3:15** *consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation*

^ How strange is that. *God's patience*, Peter is saying, *IS salvation*.

^ The fact that God is patient with us is what constitutes our salvation.

^ God's patience has many dimensions to it, but the one from our reading today is the beautiful and touching dimension that Isaiah gives us:

^ **KJV Isaiah 40:11** *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*

- ^ God's patience is at once like a shepherd with his flock, and also like a mother who gathers her young into her arms, who gently leads those who are pregnant with young.
 - ^ There is a gentleness with God's patience that we, I think, need more of in our world today.
 - ^ The ability to wait like a shepherd.
- ^ of course, Jesus picks up on this when he tells us he is the Good Shepherd –
 - ^ **John 10:11** *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*
 - ^ **John 10:14-15** *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me—¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father— and I lay down my life for the sheep.*
- ^ This is the essence of patience, the essence of waiting. Jesus shepherds us and we wait with Jesus.
 - ^ Do you see the gentleness and love present in the waiting of God for us?
 - ^ Does God's patience with us, God's gentle waiting, inspire you to understand our relationships with others a little better?
 - ^ We are called by our readings today to at once prepare ourselves for the Lord in whatever way we can, and at the same time to learn patience in the same way God is patient with us.
 - ^ God's work with us is always meant for God's greater glory. The exile of the Israelites, if we are to read it in relation to our readings today, is only in part punishment. But the punishment is only so that the glory of God can truly show to the exiled people of God and those who have exiled them.

- ^ **2 Peter 3:8** *...a single day is like a thousand years with the Lord and a thousand years are like a single day.*
- ^ **Isaiah 55:8** *...For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways My ways, says the LORD. [9] For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts*
- ^ In other words, God has something in mind for us if we can simply develop the patience to see what it is *and wait for it.*
 - ^ This requires some spiritual maturity on our parts. It may mean we must endure some suffering, pain, exile and trouble before we see God's ways in our world. It may mean we ask with the Psalmist *...how long will you forget me, O Lord? How long will you hide your face from me? (Ps 13).* It may mean we call and demand with the author of the book of Revelation, *Maranatha, Christos, maranatha. Come, Lord Christ, come.*
 - ^ I would remind you that this is the last word in Scripture. Change it into a question and we get something like the Psalmist: *When will you come again, O Lord, when will this world be transformed by you? How about now?*
 - ^ The impatience of our need for transformation and a new world is only overcome by God's greater patience with and for us.
- ^ Patience gives us the opportunity to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord,
 - ^ by announcing God's presence among us to others through the work of Jesus Christ in our lives as a community and as individuals

^ and by tending to others with patience and openness in the way God tends to us and is patient with us.

^ Communion

^ Prepares the soul to receive Christ once again

^ We partake in our future in and with Christ

^ We partake in the new creation that God has promised us and open ourselves to being tended by the Good Shepherd

^ And we partake in Christ's body resurrected for us

^ by taking in what has already been prepared for us, through the grace of God that has gone before us

^ we partake in our union with God again

^ and we partake in the reality of our relationship with God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

^ God builds a Great Highway into our souls, hearts and minds. The wilderness opens before Him in order that we might receive Him with our whole being, in peace and patience.
AMEN.