

Worship Resources / Wild Peace / <https://youtu.be/UFt9EUIX1oQ>

2nd Sunday of Advent, Year B,

6th December, 2020

Isaiah 40:1-11 CEV / Mark 1:1-8 CEV

Prelude [video] *While We are Waiting, Come,*

music by Don Cason, arr. By Ken Baker,
played by church musician Annie Center,
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<https://youtu.be/FXlc2inVRxc>

Intro / Call to Worship

We come to prepare the way; The way for Christ – the hope of Christ, the peace of Christ – to enter our world, to enter our hearts. We cry out together in the wilderness: The kingdom of heaven has come near. We come to be part of the light—the light that shines in the darkness.

I'm glad to welcome you to online worship with Olympic View Community Church. We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love.

Advent Lighting Liturgy Video *The Bisterfeldt Family*

Reader 1: In a troubled world filled with violence and oppression, where many face isolation and the struggle just to survive, God, we call upon you to come.

Reader 2: In a world where peace seems to be so far away, we call upon you, Prince of Peace, to come.

Reader 3: In this season of Advent, we wait for the coming of Peace into our world. We await the birth of Emmanuel, God with us, who comes into our lives in a new way.

Reader 4: Come, Messiah, Come, and Save Us

Advent Candle Video with Prayer

Prayer: Dear God, we pray for the peace that only You can bring through your Son, Jesus the Christ. May we walk in the paths of peace. Amen.

Music Video *On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry*

St. Edmondsbury Cathedral Choir and Orchestra ,
posted to YouTube by Chet Valley Churches

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plr21lLgFpg>

In our reading from Isaiah this week, we hear the prophet's promise of one to come who will straighten our paths and be our shepherd. As listen to these words, let's think of the promise they hold, and whose arrival we wait in anticipation for during this season of Advent.

First Testament Reading **Isaiah 40:1-11 CEV**

Our God has said: "Encourage my people! Give them comfort.

Speak kindly to Jerusalem and announce: Your slavery is past; your punishment is over. I, the Lord, made you pay double for your sins."

Someone is shouting: "Clear a path in the desert! Make a straight road for the Lord our God.

Fill in the valleys; flatten every hill and mountain. Level the rough and rugged ground.

Then the glory of the Lord will appear for all to see. The Lord has promised this!"

Someone told me to shout, and I asked, "What should I shout?" We humans are merely grass, and we last no longer than wild flowers.

At the Lord's command, flowers and grass disappear, and so do we.

Flowers and grass fade away, but what our God has said will never change.

There is good news for the city of Zion. Shout it as loud as you can from the highest mountain. Don't be afraid to shout to the towns of Judah, "Your God is here!"

Look! The powerful Lord God is coming to rule with his mighty arm. He brings with him what he has taken in war, and he rewards his people.

The Lord cares for his nation, just as shepherds care for their flocks. He carries the lambs in his arms, while gently leading the mother sheep.

Scripture Video *Isaiah 40:1-11 The Lord Will Rescue His People*

Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlwaBkY9sfc>

A Time of Prayer

Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer. If you would like to share a specific request to be included in our communal prayer time, please leave a comment in the video below, or email myself at: vicarglenn@gmail.com, and I'll make sure to include that request in next week's service, as well as send a prayer chain email, if you would like.

Joys and Concerns

We lift Carol Bowers as she continues to struggle with recovering from her recent stroke and potential tumors. May God grant her and Jerry strength, and guide her caregivers as they diagnose and treat her condition.

We also keep Matthew Schultz in our prayers as he proceeds with chemotherapy to fight colon cancer.

We also remember Jana Helmuth as she travels to Omaha to see her mother who was diagnosed with COVID 19 three weeks ago whose condition has been declining. May she have safe travels and a meaningful visit.

Let's bring these concerns and others in our lives to God together in prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

Our gracious, eternal God, give your attention to us as we again seek to “prepare the way of the Lord” on our advent journey.

When we are weak-kneed and world weary, lift us up. When we have lost our way or lost hope may we hear you speaking softly and tenderly to us. When we cannot banish from our minds and continue to hold close the sins of the past give us the courage to claim your grace and to say: “enough is enough.” When we are fearful of our own mortality, give us the trust in your word which endures forever.

When we are timid or fearful about the message of hope which we proclaim, give us the courage to claim and to witness to the good news.

In the midst of all the despair the world and life can present cause us to find comfort

in the good news. May we never forget that our message is a message of comfort and of love and of faithfulness.

Lift us up to a high mountain of living. Lift us up to know the power of your might. Lift us up to know that you will “feed (your) flock like a shepherd.” Lift us up to know that you will hold us close to you. Lift us up to know that you will gently lead us.

What we pray for ourselves we also pray for others. Be with all those places where inhumanity is shown toward any of your children. Be in those places of war and conflict. Be in the sufferings of those who have experienced natural disasters, persecution or famine. May all the earth be captured by the will to love. May all the earth be touched to change. Amen

In our gospel lesson this morning, we are introduced to the voice in the wilderness Isaiah speaks of, John the Baptist, who also waited in anticipation for the promised one who would follow him. As we hear these words from Mark, let’s think about the promise we find in that same anticipation for our own lives.

Gospel Lesson Mark 1:1-8 CEV

This is the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

It began just as God had said in the book written by Isaiah the prophet, “I am sending my messenger to get the way ready for you.

In the desert someone is shouting, ‘Get the road ready for the Lord! Make a straight path for him.’”

So John the Baptist showed up in the desert and told everyone, “Turn back to God and be baptized! Then your sins will be forgiven.”

From all Judea and Jerusalem crowds of people went to John. They told how sorry they were for their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan River.

John wore clothes made of camel’s hair. He had a leather strap around his waist and ate grasshoppers and wild honey.

John also told the people, “Someone more powerful is going to come. And I am not good enough even to stoop down and untie his sandals.

I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!

Scripture Video Mark 1:1-8 *The Preaching Of John The Baptist*

Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=knS1FeXBd2Q>

Message – Wild Peace

We all have our own conceptions of what we think about when we consider the term “wilderness.” We tend to think of wild, untamed spaces, places that lack definition. What we imagine depends on our own perspective. Coming from Pennsylvania, or “Penn’s Woods,” my natural inclination is to think of a vast, mountainous forest. Likewise, I imagine those who have been raised in the Northwest have a similar conception, albeit with different sized mountains. However we conceptualize that image, all of our images have certain similarities. The sense of remoteness, of being truly immersed in something that is beyond the safety and security of the well-ordered places we call home. Often that very difference is what draws us to visit the “wilderness,” to experience something bigger and majestic, to admire the raw beauty of nature. But that also comes with it’s own share of potential fear and anxiety, of becoming “lost” in that wilderness.

Most of us when we journey into the wild, do so by taking precautions to avoid that scenario. We use maps and make sure we are familiar with the terrain. We make sure we have enough provisions to provide for our needs should something unexpected happen. We check the weather forecast. The list can be exhaustive. But we do everything we can to prevent becoming lost and disoriented in the unfamiliar territory of whatever wilderness we find ourselves in. Our efforts are focused on avoiding the real fear of losing the connection to everything that gives us security and comfort. It can be novel and refreshing to “rough it” for a few days, but we do so knowing the way home, and with the assurance that our trip will have an eventual return to “civilization,” in however we define that. But it’s also important to realize that not everybody has that same experience. Some people do get lost in the wilderness. Some people find themselves facing that fear of being lost, despite the best of efforts to avoid it. Some find themselves in the wilderness not of their own accord.

Throughout history, those who find themselves in the margins of society often are pushed into the wild. Lepers, gypsies, Jews, Native Americans, and many other unpopular minorities have often been segregated into enclaves in the wilder parts of the world, kept apart because of who they are or represent. And then there are

those who actively choose to head into the unknown, often to escape the oppression and reality of living in the more “civilized” areas.

My ancestors left Germany to escape religious persecution for the wilds of Pennsylvania. Many people left the East to travel through hardship to the wilderness of Oregon and Washington, for the opportunities a new life here presented that weren't available where they originated. There are many reasons people enter the wildernesses of life and the world. Some are by choice, others not so much. Yet from a biblical perspective, the concept of the wilderness, and being lost there, is a recurring image.

In the Creation story, we have Adam and Eve being cast out of the Garden into the wild. There's the story of the Exodus, and 40 years of wandering in the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. We have stories of the prophets like Isaiah wandering in the wild places. Which brings us to our lesson from Mark today.

John is another such prophet, one who really lives the part. He survives on locusts and wild honey, he wears a rough camel hide garment cinched with a leather belt. The imagery is that of a wild man. I picture a grisly, unkempt beard, and wild long hair with leaves and twigs in it. Someone who has made the wilderness their home. And like his prophetic predecessors, it wasn't exactly his own choice. John's message was not one that struck a popular chord with the powers that be in “civilized” Judea. Unlike the Pharisees and Temple priests, his message was that repentance was yours to be had simply by seeking it, not by following hundreds of rules, making the right offerings, in other words, by following the rules developed by men. John offered the simple ritual cleansing by baptism in a spirit of genuine repentance for renewal. Likewise, he was critical of the establishment with their false piety, and the illegitimate power and control they exercised that was not of God, but of a foreign oppressor. So he found himself driven to the wilderness of the Dead Sea and what we think of as the West Bank today. He found himself in the company of the other outcasts of the time: the lepers and diseased; the political resistance such as the Zealots, and the separatists like the Essenes. It really wasn't bad company. While I can't endorse the violent means and aims of the Zealots, all these groups were against the oppression and tyranny of the Roman occupation, and the religious and political systems created to support that regime. And by all accounts, his ministry enjoyed a certain amount of popularity. While the passage in Mark may exaggerate a little with “all of Jerusalem” seeking him out, it's clear he had a sizable following. He certainly attracted the notice of the authorities, and not in a favorable way. He had a certain flair for questioning the legitimacy of the Herodian dynasty, which didn't go

over so well with kings named Herod. It's into this back story that Jesus enters in our text from Mark.

Unlike other Gospels, there is no introductory story in Mark. No birth narrative, no genealogy. We get right into the meat of things from the start. If you were to reduce this lesson to a heading and bullet points, it would read like this:

God's Good News,

- Prophets predict messenger,
- John the messenger appears and prepares,
- The Lord appears with the Holy Spirit and shows the Way with a capital W.

If you want to shorten that down to a single phrase, God and God's reign invade the world. Unlike the other Synoptic Gospels, Mark doesn't make this start as a human story. We aren't told of how Jesus is linked to David, we aren't told of how his human parent's faithful and honorable actions brought him to human form. In Mark it's bam! God in human form is here. Salvation is at hand. God's kingdom is coming. God has had a plan all along and now it's come to fruition. But it's not coming from the great powers in Jerusalem. It's not coming from a royal army that will decimate the Romans. It's coming from these followers in the wilderness. It's coming from these people in the margins, this wild man in the desert. John brought the news of repentance and Jesus brings the free grace of God. But that's not the end of the Gospel. It's just the beginning.

God's invasion is coming regardless of our participation or preparedness. The question is, where do we find God's work in the wilderness of today? And how many of us are feeling "lost in the wilderness," feeling like we see less and less of the familiar, of the secure hallmarks that we value.

The events of the past year have truly introduced us to a whole new understanding of "wilderness," To the point that "normal" seems to be an unfamiliar term. Our new pandemic reality has turned our worlds upside down. One has only to turn on the news, if one has the courage to do so. It seems as if the metaphorical wilderness of our world is expanding, not contracting. We've endured one of the most divisive election seasons in memory, often finding ourselves at odds with friends and family. Many of us have found ourselves isolated and alone, learning how to get by under quarantine, having to learn new ways to shop, to work, to be the church. I don't know about you, but I feel myself pushed further and further into the margins, finding myself more and more lost in the "wilderness." It's a place none of us likes, a place of uncertainty, of fear and anxiety.

But it's also the place we find Jesus, the place where we find God's invasion at work. It's in the eyes of the children around us who struggle with food instability. It's in the fight for legitimacy and equal treatment of people who want to be treated fairly without discrimination based solely on who they are. It's in the struggles of those who are just trying to get by, whose livelihood vanished in an instant with shutdowns and restrictions. It's in the tents of those who have no home, and the hearts of those who struggle with isolation and the loneliness and despair that can bring. They are the people we find in the wild. But as individuals, we have our own margins, our own places of being lost. Places we find ourselves lost in when we experience those trials of life. Places filled with guilt for things said in haste, for poor choices. Places that grief and sadness can lead to. Like those real margins, these places can be just as disorienting and uncomfortable.

Today's passage gives us the hope that that is not all there is, that there is another way. The suffering servant of Isaiah becomes the hope of Mark's Gospel, the light that can lead us out of the wilderness. The question is, are we ready to join God in fighting the growing darkness of the wilderness around us? Are we willing to be a beacon of hope and shalom in the wilderness, to be the Christ light that shows there is another Way with a capital W. God is God and God's work will be done, with or without us. The ultimate choice is ours. Will we speak up, will we risk being the outcast, the downtrodden? Better yet, are we willing to set aside comfort and join the ever growing numbers at the margins, in the wilderness of today?

God's work is not found where people are comfortable, in the center of society. Sadly that is often where the Gospel fades and withers. This Jesus movement grew from the margins. The readers of Mark weren't comfortable folk in the upper crust. They were Gentiles under persecution from Rome because of their beliefs and practices. They knew all about life in the wilderness, yet they chose to stick with it, to be the lights they were called to be, whatever the risk, to care and champion those on the margins.

As their faith descendents, what is our response to be? As individuals, do we have the courage to speak out in a public way? To take the risk of feeling uncomfortable, of not being popular? As a community of faith, what steps are we willing to take? Are we to be a sanctuary and voice for the oppressed and persecuted? What are we willing to risk, what actions are we willing to take? God is at work all around us, but relies on us to be the divine hands and feet in this realm, as individuals, and as a community of faith.

Many today would have us believe that Christ's return is just around the corner, that we should wait for renewal and redemption from some apocalyptic end time event literally coming to pass. However, that's not the message that Jesus preached. He constantly taught that the kingdom of God was drawing near, and that our role was to seek that kingdom breaking into this world. Our actions are to support the mission Dei, or God's mission in this world, not wait for the next. Our place is with the lost in the wilderness, at the margins, to be their voice, to light their path. Perhaps our own times in the wilderness of this past year are a divine reminder of where we belong, not in the center of society, but at the edge, with those in the margins; not comfortable and secure, but living the struggle alongside those whose lives are defined by struggle.

Richard Boyce, a professor at Union Presbyterian Seminary, provides a good illustration. He states that "this good news begins with an invasion, at God's initiative.

The bus has left the station. Get out of the way, or get on the way." I hope and pray that we all choose to get on that bus. That is the real Good News and I pray that we live that kind of Gospel life, being the beacon of hope and peace we are called to be in the wildernesses of this world. Amen.

Call to Serve.

As we continue to seek to be a place of compassion and support to our community, seeking to give comfort to those in need, we ask that you give prayerful consideration as to how you may support our efforts. If you would like to make a donation, gifts can still be mailed to our church office, or online donations can be made through the link in the video description. Thanks again for all your support, and may we continue to work together to keep being a place of ministry that seeks to promote the growth of God's shalom around us. This morning, as Annie shares the following song, let's give some thought as to how we can be God's light of peace and comfort in the wilderness of today, and what being the body of Christ really means.

A Time for Reflection

Reflection on the Word [video] *You are the Sacred Mystery*

music by Twila Paris,

played by church musician Annie Center

<https://youtu.be/j57MiM1982M>

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

O Faithful One,
accept these gifts of our hearts and hands.
May they be multiplied and magnified
as the living presence of Christ in the world. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God is a God of Beginnings. There is always time for a fresh start, a turning back, a breaking open to something new. God is with you, now, guiding you into the newness of this life. Embrace God's ever-expanding love, and know that you are forgiven, and have new life in Christ. Share the Good News, that beacon of hope and peace in the wilderness of today. .

Postlude [video] *Praise the One Breaks the Darkness, American Folk Melody,*

performed by church musician Annie Center,

<https://youtu.be/uJLbDW4pBg8>