December 10, 2023 **MESSINGERS OF HOPE**

Our gospel reading for this second Sunday in advent is St. Mark 1: 1- 8 in which Mark begins his writing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He begins it with good news of a great achievement of God. This achievement is nothing like our earthly achievements that in time will crumble away or are soon to be forgotten. It is an achievement that is equal to God creating the heavens and earth as told in the creation story in the Bible. The birth of Jesus is big, it is mighty, and it is great forever.

Mark brings us to remember the God given vision of the prophet Malachi 3:1 (RSV) "Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts" and in Isaiah 40:3 (RSV) “A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God". This is part of the vision. Isaiah has been allowed to see the great council of God, to see the whole company of heaven, angels, and many other things, during a meeting with God in the heavenly council.

The timing is right, and God wants everyone to know about it because everyone will be affected through it. The King is coming, the Son of God is coming, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight-,”is the message of the voice of one calling in the wilderness. Our lives at times can appear to ourselves and others like a wilderness. A wilderness can be a harsh environment where very little grows. The hot sun burns the ground and all that lives on it. While the strong winds blow away the loosened soil leaving potholes and exposed stones. These are places to be avoided. Few people live there, and traveling through desert places can be hard and slow. And yet at times it is necessary to travel through such a place of bareness to reach the promised land. The sin in our lives, the evil we do to God and each other continues to enlarge the wilderness in our heart.

The writer of the gospel, Mark points to John the baptizer in the wilderness who is calling to all of us to repent. We also have a voice in our wilderness, in our heart calling us to repent, to change our ways. We need to listen to that voice and stop making potholes and exposing the rocks in our hearts. John the baptizer is calling us to change our ways, to fill the holes, to bury the rocks, to make the path smooth through the wilderness. He is asking us to repent of our self-centered ways and to start giving of ourselves for the wellbeing of others. That is what God had intended at the beginning of creation. Then our lives will look like a Garden of Eden.

Prepare the way of the Lord. When you repent and are truly sorry of the pain you have caused to others and yourself, then your pathway will be like a slippery slide that will quickly allow the King, Jesus Christ to come into your life. Mark continues with his own vision, “And there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.” Mark sees and believes in the promise of salvation for everyone.

God knows how we continuously fail to do what is right in the sight of God. Indeed, when we repent of our bad ways, it does make it easier for the King, the Savior to come and restore us to the way we ought to be. John the baptizer baptizes with water from the river Jordan. He knows that what he is doing will not have a lasting effect on people’s lives. People come to him confessing their sins, and seeking some comfort in their life, and even hope for a lasting change.

In many ways we too seek some comfort in our life, respite from our troubles. We turn to doctors, counsellors, spiritual healers, lawyers, family, friends, neighbors, and anyone that can offer a glimmer of hope. Their endeavors can only bring temporary relief, and so we continue to suffer. John the baptizer can only do the same, but he points to the One that is coming, he is greater and will work true wonders in our life. Please join us in our Sunday worship at 11:00 AM, if you would like to learn more.

Peace and Blessing of Advent!

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj

Minister