

## **Sermon Advent 2 Year B**

### **2 Peter 3:8-15**

Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

### **Mark 1:1-8**

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.”

**Prayer:**

Father, may both my words and my thoughts be always pleasing to you and a help your people gathered here.

-AMEN

**Sermon:**

Today is Advent 2. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Christian Year.

It's almost buried in the racket about Christmas shopping and Covid and the Election Hangover.

This is the Church's New Year.

As St. Mark wrote, so long ago,

We are at the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.

This is a great time for reflection,

*or at least thinking about reflection,*

*even if the world out there insists that we listen to its bells and whistles.*

Mark's Gospel begins with the John the Baptist,

a prophet in the wilderness,<sup>i</sup> crying out the story

of salvation and the Messiah,

whose earthly work was *about to begin*.

On the other hand, Peter's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter speaks about the End Times.

“... all these things are to be dissolved”, he wrote,

“what sort of persons ought you to be”, ...

“waiting for ... the coming of the day of God...?” <sup>ii</sup>

For people back then, just like today,

beginnings and endings mattered a lot.

We tend to keeping track of beginnings and endings.

That's a big part of what it means to be mortal.

We keep track of our comings and goings in this mortal coil.

In these scary and irritating Covid days,

beginning's and endings are more poignant than ever.

We can lose track of time these days,

With one day running into the other. <sup>iii</sup>

Today's Gospel by Mark was about beginnings.

And so was Peter's letter.

The 2nd Coming was a big deal then, just as it is a big deal today.

Peter probably dictated his letter sitting in a Roman prison cell,

awaiting execution, after his long life of work

as Jesus' student and as a key founder of the Church.

St. Peter was writing about The End. <sup>iv</sup>

Life under the Roman Thumb was really, really hard.

Peter and Paul both felt sharp Roman iron, as did their Lord.

Peter knew, as Paul also knew, that many Christians  
anxiously awaited Jesus return.

They began looking forward to going home.<sup>v</sup>

As the days past, and Jesus tarried,  
Some Christians were getting antsy.<sup>vi</sup>  
But Jesus was slow to return.

Jesus seemed to say that he would come back soon.  
Peter thought he'd be back soon. So did Paul. <sup>vii</sup>  
They were waiting. We are still waiting.

The early Christians, really tried to figure out WHEN.  
So do many Christians today.

Peter said "With the Lord ... a thousand years are like one day." <sup>viii</sup>  
So we are on day two!

It's like living in Covid time:

... a week can seem like a life time.

... The 5<sup>th</sup> Zoom meeting of the week seems like eternity.

But the work of God's Kingdom can't be done  
when we are stuck in our own heads.

The work of building and adapting God's kingdom,  
and rebuilding it and readapting it, for this generation,  
is our work.

the next generation and the next will have their work, too,  
unless Jesus no longer tarries,  
and we wake up in Heaven one bright Spring Day.

Lo! he comes with clouds descending,  
once for favored sinners slain;  
thousand, thousand saints attending  
swell the triumph of his train.

Alleluia! Alleluia!

God appears on earth to reign.<sup>ix</sup>

Modern people have a fascination with the End Times.

20 years ago Dana and I were reading, on vacation,  
the "Left Behind" books,  
by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins.<sup>x</sup>

Those two men thought that they'd figured out the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming,  
Down to the tiniest detail.

But Peter and Paul really had no clue,  
because Jesus said he didn't know when.  
Only his Dad in heaven knew.

*If Jesus didn't know, but was willing to keep walking, then so am I.*  
Jesus was braver and smarter and wiser than me.  
Jesus is Lord! It trust him!

In another life time, in the 1970's BD -- *Before Dana* --  
I spent a lot of time in the company of  
a lot of very diverse folks.  
And I spent a lot of time alone on the road.

The Ontario Provincial Police didn't much care for me.  
The French Police didn't give me much peace either,  
No matter who I was hanging with. <sup>xi</sup>

As a recovering Catholic Seminarian, life was a great mystery.  
I was in the dark. Sometimes it felt like The End.  
*But it was really just the beginning.*

I think that is how it felt to the Early Christians.  
Burdened by faith, but crushed by doubt and fear.

Life can feel like that today, too.  
But God was with me, then. And God is with us now.

The way home to God is, for most of us,  
Straight through whatever wilderness She throws at us.

The way Home is straight through whatever stuff  
That God tosses in our face.

You can't get to God without working through your own Wilderness,  
because in that Wilderness you'll find that 150%  
of your best effort is not enough.  
But the mere shadow of God is plenty enough.

Sometimes it takes just the slightest touch.

Do you recall the story of the woman, who was healed  
From a lifetime of bleeding when she touched Jesus robe?

Mark's Gospel<sup>xii</sup> says that she touched his Robe.

Mathew describes her touching only the fringe of his robe. <sup>xiii</sup>  
Either way, just the slightest contact with God, was all she needed.  
Just the slightest breeze can change a boat's course.

I think that the wilderness is where,  
once we let our defenses are down,  
God's soft whisper, Gods soft hand, God's gentle wisdom  
can cut through life's noise and clatter.

For some of us, it takes a lifetime to get to that place.

For others it takes only a little while.

Even if it feels like it took a lifetime.

“Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, ... with the Lord

one day is like a thousand years,

and a thousand years are like one day.”<sup>xiv</sup>

The Lord is patiently waiting for us in the Wilderness.

Waiting for us to drop all of our stuff

and our claims and our defenses,

and to come to Him.

God has control.

But like the lady who touched Jesus robe,

we are expected to act.<sup>xv</sup>

We have to take that first step.

On your way home today, make your own silent wilderness.

Turn down the racket and listen to God.

She might have something to say.

Or when you slide under your covers tonight.

Ask the Lord to come to you Lord what is on His mind.

He’s waiting for you.

**-AMEN**

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<sup>i</sup> It may be significant, and it is certainly notable that Mark, in citing the prophet Isaiah, also misquotes him.

While Mark wrote, in reference to John the Baptizer: “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....’” Isaiah actually wrote, “A voice cries out: *‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’*”

Thus, while Mark cites Isaiah, for the proposition that John the Baptist was the *voice crying out in the wilderness*, Isaiah described a voice that said that *the straight roadway should be prepared in the wilderness*. The voice wasn’t in the wilderness, the roadway was.

I like to think that Mark did this on purpose, just as people today often twist Scripture a bit to suit the moment. It may be, however, that Mark was simply mistaken in his recollection of Isaiah. For me this does raise a question of the validity of Scripture, although it does mean that even people inspired by the Holy Spirit, can make mistakes!

<sup>ii</sup> So did many of Paul’s letters, including his letter to the Thessalonians, which we read a few weeks ago. See, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 5:1-11.

<sup>iii</sup> Poor St. John enjoyed locusts and wild honey. For breakfast, lunch and dinner. If we ate like that we might lose track of time. I wonder if he did? We’d surely appreciate the little things a lot more! We’d surely appreciate the gift of eternal life.

<sup>iv</sup> It is suggested by many scholars that he wrote circa 64-68 CE (see, 2 Peter 3:15-16). Peter probably had read some of Paul’s letters, written circa 60 CE (see, 2 Peter 3:1). It is notable that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple was destroyed by Rome on August 4, 70 CE, at the conclusion of the Jewish rebellion which began in 66 CE.

<sup>v</sup> i.e, to “heaven” or the “Kingdom of Heaven” (Grk: βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν; basileía tōn ouranōn)

<sup>vi</sup> Just like today.

<sup>vii</sup> Even though he also said he didn’t know exactly when.

<sup>viii</sup> “With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.”

<sup>ix</sup> Lo! He comes with clouds descending, Once for guilty sinners slain. (Charles Wesley, 1758)

<sup>x</sup> “Left Behind” is a multimedia franchise that started with a series of 16 bestselling religious novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, on the subject of Christian dispensationalist End Times. See, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Left\\_Behind](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Left_Behind)

<sup>xi</sup>

Spent some time feeling' inferior

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standing in front of my mirror  
Combed my hair in a thousand ways  
but I came out looking just the same

"Son, you better see the world  
I wouldn't blame you if you wanted to leave ... "  
So I got out

Paris was a place you could hide away  
if you felt you didn't fit in  
French police wouldn't give me no peace

...

Down along the Left Bank minding my own  
Was knocked down by a human stampede  
Got arrested for inciting the people to riot  
when all I wanted was a cup of tea  
I was accused  
I moved on

Down in Rome I wasn't getting enough  
of the things that keep a young man alive  
My body stunk but I kept my funk  
at a time when I was right out of luck  
Getting desperate indeed I was  
Looking like a tourist attraction  
Oh my dear I better get out of here  
'for the Vatican don't give no sanction...."

"Every Picture Tells A Story" Rod Stewart (1971)

<sup>xii</sup> See, Mark 5:21-34.

<sup>xiii</sup> Matthew 9:16-20: In Greek ἀπὸ τοῦ ἱματίου καὶ χεῖρον. Genitive of direct object after the verb "to touch." The sense here may be "tassel", the loose end of the cord that was tied around the waste. Every faithful Jewish man had a tassel, often with a fringed end, cf., Num.15:37-38, Deut.22:12. See, [https://biblehub.com/greek/himatiou\\_2440.htm](https://biblehub.com/greek/himatiou_2440.htm)

<sup>xiv</sup> 2 Peter 3:8

<sup>xv</sup> See, Walter Breuggemann, "Destiny, Not Fate", 11/5/2020