

Plan B – Peace
Texts: Isaiah 40:1-11, Mark 1:1-8
Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church – December 6, 2020
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Waiting is difficult. Waiting, for many of us, brings with it worry and anxiety and uncertainty, and we do not always respond well to that. Expecting and hoping for something that is not yet assured is tough for most of us. In our Scripture lesson for this morning from the Gospel of Mark, we have the prophecy of Isaiah from hundreds of years earlier along with the arrival of John the Baptist as a precursor for the coming Messiah. But could they finally expect the Messiah? Could God finally be sending who the Israelites have been longing for? The prophet Isaiah talked about preparing the way for the Lord in the 6th century BC, when the Israelites found themselves in the midst of the Babylonian exile. These words of comfort and assurance have been on the lips and the hearts of God's chosen people for 500-600 years – generation after generation – before John now comes on the scene.

David Lose, senior pastor of the Mount Olivet Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, writes, “Mark literally begins his account with a promise of Isaiah. It's the promise of Isaiah to desperate Israel at one of the low points of its history. And while Mark clearly invites us to see John the Baptist as the fulfillment of Isaiah's promise that one will come crying out in the wilderness, it's the whole of Isaiah's promise of comfort, deliverance, and renewal that Mark is claiming happens in the ministry of the one John heralds.

And the thing about promises is that they are not static. Not ever. Rather, promises – if you hear and believe them – create an expectation about the future and set something in motion. When I promise my kids we'll play a board game after the chores are done on the weekend, inevitably the pieces are set out. When you promise to call someone after a date, that person typically anticipates the call. And when a friend promises you a ride home after the game, you

don't make other arrangements – why should you; you've got a promise" (From Internet. www.davidlose.net/2014/12/advent-2-b/. 12/01/20).

What happens when the promise – and the expectation – and the waiting – do not come to fruition as you would like? Even with John. I am sure some thought John was the awaited Messiah. He quickly sets the record straight, "After me comes one more powerful than I..." In other words, keep waiting. Keep hoping. Keep expecting. However, patience wears thin. One gets tired of waiting. There is anxiety on so many levels – anxiety that does not promote peace but just the opposite. Where is there peace in the waiting?

For the Israelites, they waited 500+ years. Can you imagine? For us this year, our waiting has been about returning to normal – getting together again – seeing this virus go away. It has been 9 months, but it has seemed at times like 500 years. And some of us are anxious. The virus is striking more, and it is impacting more people that we know than we did in March. Jenna has had Covid patients every shift she has worked at the Medical Center for the past few weeks. There is anxiety for our small businesses who wonder how they will survive. We are anxious for our jobs, our incomes, our bank accounts. We worry for our children and grandchildren and what kind of long-term impact this will have on them being isolated.

And quite frankly, we are tired of waiting. We want things to be the way they were. Many were separated from their families on Thanksgiving, and that did not feel right. Christmas does not look much better for some – and that just seems plain wrong. I do not like preaching to an empty church. I love our worship team who is here with me every Sunday, believe me, but I long to have the building open again and have you a part of our worship together.

Our patience is also wearing thin. I hate the way the mask fogs up my glasses. I hate it when I have walked all the way to my car in the church parking lot and I realize that I have

forgotten my mask. And I have to walk ALL the way back to the manse to get it. All of these things contribute to our struggle with having peace during these days. Where is our peace? We are expectant – on so many levels – but do we have peace?

The Gospel story here is the just the beginning of the story. John comes to point to God's true plan in sending the Messiah – in bringing Jesus to earth. John tells all the people that after him will come one more powerful than him. The expectation and the waiting will be fulfilled. Christ is coming. The time is closer than they think. They just have to wait – and expect – in peace for a little while longer.

The people realize that, and they come from all over and respond to John's message. They leave behind all their baggage and are ready for the time to come. The whole Judean countryside and all the people from Jerusalem come to John, they repent and are baptized. No longer will they carry the guilt and the weight of their sin, for this is something they can do now. And that gives them peace until God's plan is fulfilled. Jesus will be the ultimate plan B of peace. He will bring peace and justice to a world desperate for it.

Friends, Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is coming. We wait in hopeful expectation for that to happen. For us, we do not sit idly back and wait. We are expectant. We repent and confess the burden of our sin. And we live in the peace of God's plan. David Lose shares this, "what kind of waiting do they want to do? Sure, they can sit around and wait for Christmas, or Christ's return, for that matter. Or they can get in the game, see how they can spend their time, energy, wealth, and lives making a difference *right now*. Because it's not just John who is called to cry out and prepare the way. It's all of us. Right here, right now, waiting *actively*, if you will, by making a difference in the lives of the people God has put all around us. God is continuing the story of the good news of Jesus in and through our words and actions and each of us will have a

hundred and one opportunities this very week to contribute to that sacred story, to make it come alive, to help God keep God's promises here and now.

No, what we do will not bring ultimate healing or comfort or peace or justice. That's God's job, and God will keep God's promises to the fullest in the fullness of time. But we don't have to wait for that passively but are invited to throw ourselves into that venture both trusting God's promises *and* living them right here, right now.

This is the kind of active, involved, participatory waiting Advent invites. And why not get started now. After all, and as Mark says in the first words of the passage we read, this story about all those wonderful things that happened long ago? It's just the beginning, and the story continues to unfold both around us *and* through us" (From Internet. 12/01/20).

When we are a part of God's story, there is peace. When we give of ourselves in response to our faith and the love and grace God has abundantly given us, there is peace. When we can thrive during the pandemic and the division and the anger of our country, there is peace. What can you do during the time of waiting? How can you spread the peace of Christ this Christmas season? How can you help those who are feeling anxious and afraid – and bring the peace that passes understanding? Peace – Plan B. Will you receive it – and share it? Let us pray...

God of peace, these are troubled times. We are feeling less than peace-filled this year, and it troubles us. Help us, we pray, to find that peace – to experience Jesus in a new and real way this year. And then, guide us as we wait in expectation to bring peace to our homes, our communities, our world. Be with us, we pray in the name of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, Amen.