

# Homily for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent

December 7-8, 2019

Readings: Isaiah 11: 1-10; Romans 15:4-9; Matthew 3: 1-12

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Thirty years ago, as Pastoral Associate in my first parish, I was about to preach on this Second Sunday of Advent. Why not, I thought, enter and go down the main aisle ... as John the Baptist? Complete with sheepskin clothing and a long wig? Shouting, "Repent! Repent! The Kingdom of heaven has come near!" So I did! And I can assure you of this. It caught everyone's attention!

What did I say after that? I have no idea, but here's what I say now. What on earth does that rough and tumble, harsh-sounding John the Baptist have to do with that powerfully poetic vision of First Isaiah? The one we know so well and love so dearly? The Peaceable Kingdom. The lion lying down with the lamb. Or, in today's world, the refugee safely snuggled in the arms of the ICE enforcer. Total and utter peace. Where are *we* in this picture?

Hard to imagine, isn't it? Would it help to know that Isaiah's world, in the 8<sup>th</sup> century before Jesus, was not so very different from ours? With kings—rulers—like dead stumps, striding around in self-importance. With divisions and hatred at every turn. With wars, even little firefights, everywhere. Surely, underneath it all was the profound yearning for the peaceable kingdom—so poetically, creatively proclaimed by Isaiah.

Not unlike our own deepest hopes and dreams. Especially now, when we're inundated with the din of newscasts blasting name-calling, bullying, hate crimes, shootings, sharply divisive points of view on a daily basis. Impeachment proceedings. Indictments for bribery. And stores ... daily ads ... intruding constantly: "Look at this," "buy that." When even our best intentioned preparations—cookie baking, choosing just the right gift for a loved one, writing out cards—can simply feel like it's all too much! Don't we long for, yearn for, this peaceable kingdom at hand? Now? Where and how it is to be found?

Let me suggest this. *Stop. Get quiet.* Shush our outside noises. Hush our inside clamoring. Yes, make time for prayer. Even a little bit of time. First thing in the

day. Every day. (Okay, maybe after morning coffee.) How about imagining one of those beautiful images of Isaiah? Go deep into it. Listen, and listen again. Allow ourselves just to be drawn into the quiet, into our dream, our hope. Not just once, but today. Tomorrow. And the next day.

As we pause and listen deeply ... can we hear *this* truth? That This One proclaimed by John the Baptist has already come! Jesus the Christ is already here! We've already been baptized into his Holy Spirit, that fire of love and passion for justice. Indeed, in and through our Baptism, we've *already* been named priest, prophet, and royal person—king and queen. Responsible for our lives and our choices. *We're* the ones charged to announce the Good News: the kingdom of heaven is at hand! Each of us and all of us together, the community of the baptized.

So, then, what does that mean for us, here and now? Can we take an intimate moment with Jesus? Can we make a home for the seeds of Christ's peace and justice? Yes, can we become pregnant? And nourish that small life growing deep within? We'll know that this seed of life is growing when we can listen deeply to others, especially ones with whom we disagree. When we can then hear their pain and struggle beneath words they spew forth. We'll know that this seed of life is growing whenever we feel the kicks of new life from deep within. Urging us to stand tall for what we know to be true. To speak our truth, even and especially when it's not comfortable. We'll know that new life is growing when we refuse to become exhausted from trying to meet everyone's needs—like scatter shot, all over the place—rather than responding only out of our own deepest gifts and strength. We'll certainly know this new life is taking form when we begin to feel ever more at peace ourselves, so much so that we absolutely *must* share it with others.

This Advent, this season of pregnancy and birthing, it might look like this. Groups of college students beginning their preparation for a spring break of service—among folks they haven't encountered, folks who can stretch their present levels of comfort. It might look like sitting down to holiday dinners, prepared to listen deeply to views diametrically opposed to ours, for the purpose of greater understanding. It might look like connecting with one local outreach group, where our best gifts will meet the needs of those served.

It will definitely look like peacemaking. Focusing, preparing to greet the Love of Our Lives. And *then* become an avenue, a way, to bring that Love into our own little corner of the world. To become our own version of John the Baptist announcing loud and clear: “The kingdom of heaven is at hand!” And we won’t need to get dressed up in odd-looking clothes to do it!