

## **Advent 2B – 12/10/2023**

Endings have beginnings and beginnings have endings. So often we dread endings. The endings of a life, sometimes the endings of a school year, a graduation or position. As emotionally difficult as they can be, there can also be a sense of celebration in each one.

Normally when there is an ending, there will be something or someone that we will be missing. This is when we come more to the realization that hopefully we can be thankful for these people and times. At 63, I have been through a number of seasons in life as many of you also have been. We learn to savor moments with people and things.

Beginnings can be difficult also, but it is what keeps us going and moving on to new moments to savor. In our gospel lesson today, we hear the beginning of our first Gospel ever written. In Mark we hear, The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Context is always important. This Gospel was believed to have been written in AD 70. This is when the Roman Empire destroyed and looted the temple and Jerusalem itself. This event ended the revolt and huge numbers of Jews left Judaea to make a home elsewhere.

Mark's Gospel is the shortest. He doesn't start out with a Christmas story as Mathew and Luke do. I'm wondering if he felt he needed to get some good news out as soon as possible. He begins by announcing that this is the beginning of an account of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of Man. Mark was putting down Jesus' story.

Mark immediately moves on to John the Baptist by using the prophet Isaiah who prophesied John the Baptist many years before. In our Old Testament lesson, we hear the prophet Isaiah reminding people that Jerusalem needs comfort. They have just returned from exile. This time it was the Babylonians who had destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

The prophet Isaiah in this section of the book is trying to give the Hebrew people comfort, hope and joy. Even though it was their behavior that led them into exile, God was still there for them. We hear those familiar words of comfort hope, and joy, "Comfort, O Comfort my people, says your God. Isaiah also says, In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. This was first prophesying John the Baptist and then Jesus, God coming to earth.

Now in Mark, history is repeating itself and the people are looking again for God to come and comfort them and walk with them. Mark is reminding them of Jesus by retelling Jesus' story from his point of view. God had come to earth in Jesus in order to prepare God's people for the restoration of their lives, land and temple.

God has promised to be with God's people and has never given up on this promise. God's people then, in Isaiah's time, Mark's time, and now us, need constant reminders of God's expectations and promise of comfort, hope, and joy. Might John the Baptist be giving us the stance or posture that we need to constantly be in the process of restoration?

First of all, John the Baptist was out in the wilderness. He was not in a town, nor in the temple. One could say he was different, dressed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He was preaching a baptism of repentance, but yet there was someone coming who was greater than he. John said he was not even worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of this person's sandals.

The statement about his sandals must have been important as all four Gospel writers have used it. John was making the point that the focus should not be on him. He was the messenger. Jesus was the savior that the people were looking for. He was the one to bring comfort and joy.

Even though John the Baptist was baptizing, he said it wasn't the full baptism. The one coming would be baptizing with the Holy Spirit. We are in the first chapter of Mark, in the first eight verses and we are already hearing about the Holy Spirit. Did they even know who the Holy Spirit was?

John the Baptist was out in the wilderness telling people to get ready for this one who is greater than he. Mark identifies this person who is coming as Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and that he is bringing good news. This is what the people needed to hear as Jerusalem had been demolished and they wanted to restore what had been broken. John's posture or stance was one of repentance and being vulnerable in order to recognize Jesus in the unexpected places.

Good News came to the Hebrew people in Isaiah's time, came to the people in Mark's time and continues to come to us today. God fulfills God's promises to bring comfort, hope, joy and walk alongside God's people to restore what has been broken. Sometimes the brokenness comes from decisions that have been made and sometimes it just happens.

Each one of us makes decisions and will continue to make decisions that cause brokenness in our lives and other's lives. There will be things that happen to

us and the ones we love that we do not have any control over that cause brokenness. I am sure that everyone of us here and online can think of someone and maybe ourselves who are experiencing brokenness right now.

The good news is that regardless if it was because of decisions that we made or someone else has made or just because it happened, that God in Jesus Christ comes to comfort us and walk beside us. Many of us have received comfort, hope and joy in our times of brokenness and we have offered words of comfort to others in their brokenness.

The prophet Isaiah reminded the people that regardless of Jerusalem's choices that may have gotten them into exile originally, God still loved them and wanted to help them be restored to wholeness. When we read Jesus' story, he never turned anyone away, especially if they were seeking restoration, wholeness.

This is the good news for us and good news that we are called to offer to others. This Advent season is about remembering the comfort, hope and joy that we can have in Jesus. People seem to repeat history. God in Jesus Christ remains constant in comforting us, giving us hope and joy and walking beside us through our brokenness into wholeness which brings us joy.

It is when we receive the words of good news, of comfort, hope, and joy, a reminder of God's constant love that we can move from endings into beginnings.