

Second Sunday of Advent, December 6, 2020, Year B

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 1:1-8

***“Wake Up Call”***

Did you grow up in a house where your mother or father used various methods of getting you up and out of bed each morning? It might have been “wakey, wakey – eggs and bakey!” or the ever favorite “Up, Up, Up!” If you were a sluggish riser – it was like getting a bucket of cold water thrown on you. Of course the light would be turned on to make sure that your eyes were open. That is just what John the Baptist must have been like to the Jewish people of his day.

The second Advent candle that we lit today – another purple candle – is the candle of Peace. Being at peace does not mean being lulled to sleep, or comatose – to the events and the world around us. Peace means waking up and calling upon the Lord, and recognizing that He is Lord – and therefore He is in charge. He has a plan for our lives – and He wants us to recognize that.

In today's Holy Gospel, John the Baptist's ministry burst in upon the surprised Jewish world. You see, many people had been looking for a sign from God, but they really did not expect it to look like this. Many had wanted a Messiah to lead them against the Romans, but they were not anticipating a prophet telling them to repent. John was a voice, shouting across the dreams, and perhaps the nightmares, of the Judaism of Herod and Caiaphas, - the Judaism that told people again and again the story of freedom but had no idea what freedom would really look like when it came. Some must have thought that John was mad, they must have thought that he was nuts! Here he was in the desert wearing a coat of camels hair, and going around eating – what? Locusts and wild honey. Stop for a second – he was not eating bugs. Locusts was the pod of the carob plant or tree – that was the locusts as it was called, and the wild honey may well have been honey – but this sounds a whole lot better than him going around eating bugs. He was not eating a regular meal – there was no Denny's, no Bobby's, there was nothing like that. Out in the desert – he had to do what he had to do. He was telling them to repent, and then he is washing people in the river. They must have thought that it was him who was dreaming; but here he was, splashing cold water all over them and telling them to get ready for the greatest moment in Jewish history, in world history. The bright light – like the parents would put on - was shining in their faces was the story they all knew very well, but with a new twist.

Every year, at Passover-time, the people of Israel knew and recited the story of the Exodus from Egypt, telling over and over how God rescued Israel from Pharaoh, and bringing them through the Red Sea and then across the wilderness to their promised land. Along with the creation story, it was the most important story for them in the whole Old Testament, and the people listening to John would have known it well. But instead of simply hearing the words and remembering the story, John was making it real – right before their eyes. John told them they could come through the water of baptism and repentance, and be free - leaving behind the world of sin that they were living in, which was rebelling against the living God and be free. They were looking at and going in the wrong direction. John told them that it was time to turn round and go the right way - which is what ‘repentance’ means – changing your life from the things you should not be doing. It is all about behavior! It was time to stop dreaming and wake

up to God's reality - because someone was coming, coming very soon, and John was getting people ready.

If someone came to Douglas and told you that you needed to get ready because some incredibly famous person was on their way to pay you a visit, it would be only natural that you would rush around straightening things up so you could put your best foot forward. Well, John was like the messenger, or public relations person, going ahead of royalty, getting everywhere ready for the One "*more powerful than I*" who was coming after him. Israel needed to wake up. Every person within Israel needed to wake up. Someone was coming who would overshadow even John - the Messiah, God's Anointed One. One thing He was sure of was that what John had done with water, the Coming One would do with Spirit - the Holy Spirit. This promise - was a warning, too, of course, but more importantly, it was a promise.

Our Gospel reading this morning points to the words from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 40 - versed 3 - which we read this morning, "*a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'*" Mark also brought in the words from the Prophet Malachi in chapter 3:1, "*See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me.*" This was all unrolling and unraveling - coming true right before their eyes.

What John was promising was soon to become a reality. The Lord who they have been seeking will soon come to His temple; the Messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come. One of the great promises that Israel had cherished for centuries was that when Yahweh finally made the Exodus story happen all over again, setting His people free once and for all, that would be the time when He would come to live personally with His people. He would be with them; He would be their God, and they would be His people. As we have been singing already during Advent - Emmanuel would come - God with us. He came as a baby and grew to be the Man that was foretold, fulfilling every single prophesy about the Messiah.

In the original Exodus story God's presence lived with Israel, leading them in the pillar of cloud and fire. Now, it was to be similar but different. God's Spirit would live with people, in people, becoming the air that we breathe, the sacramental bread that we eat, the fire in our hearts. The promise they had lived on, John says is now going to come true. Sadly, they were certainly were not ready - and so the need for a wake up.

In the very first verse of the Gospel of Mark, we are told what to expect; all this is the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, God's son ('God's son', in the Judaism of the first century, was a title used for the Messiah). But things were not that clear at the time. What they had was the "*voice of one calling in the desert*" and the water that he was baptizing people with: and he was going to prepare the way for the human figure who would make sense, but very disturbing sense, of it all - and He would not baptize with water - but the Holy Spirit.

The main thing Mark, in this opening passage of his Gospel, gets us to do, is to understand that God would be sending His Anointed One to change everything! Have you ever had a situation

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where you have trouble sleeping, and it seems that the night goes on forever. You check your watch, or clock and it says “2:05”, “3:15”, “4:05”. Have you ever had that happen? It is not fun, right? And then, just when you start to doze off a bit, suddenly the alarm clock goes off, - at least someone does not come in and say “wakey, wakey, eggs and bakey!” It really is morning and you have got to get going. There is that wakeup call! Part of this message here is to all of us – who are just getting by and “going with the flow” – almost half asleep. It can happen to all of us during this “virus” where we put it into automatic pilot – to just get by. The season of Advent is for us to see just what it will take for us to wake up and really prepare for the coming of the Promised One – Jesus – who will come again. Come, Lord Jesus!