

Sermon Given by Alexis Chase, Executive Director of Georgia Interfaith Power & Light, at Church of the Advent, Madison GA on December 4, 2011

Scripture Mark 1: 1-8

On this second Sunday of Advent, in today's gospel lesson we get our first look at John the Baptist. Our Scripture for today says that; "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."

Now I hear this every once in awhile and I am sure none of you are thinking it, but people assume, because I represent GIPL, I am a Christian and an environmentalist and I represent a faith based environmental organization, that I think we should all live like John the Baptist. Out in the woods, eating locusts, wild honey, wearing nothing but what we can collect from nature, completely off the grid. But I promise that's not what I am hear to say to you. It's also not what I expect from you, but more importantly it's not what this Scripture expects from you either, it's also not what our faith expects from us. But trust me and also know that I do absolutely love saying this though, our faith and our Scripture do require something of us. We are asked to respond and to live our lives in such a way as to make that response evident. Scripture doesn't want us to live like John the Baptist, but it does expect that we listen and respond to what this Scripture is saying to us today.

So let's talk about John the Baptist a little bit. This is an interesting guy. Lived in the woods, ate some weird stuff, dressed in a very strange way. But the writers of the Gospel of Mark told us these details for a reason. His diet, his home and his clothes all help mark him as a prophet. The original writers and readers of this Gospel would have been familiar with the Old Testament Prophetic tradition and the writer of Mark was trying to make sure we see this John as a prophet by specifically referencing his clothes, food and location

In the Old Testament, the prophet Daniel made a point to mention that he would abstain from meat and wine as a sign of his devotion. By abstaining from meat and wine, John the Baptist' diet of locusts and honey also marked him as a prophet. His clothing and living in the wilderness identifies him with the prophet Elijah.

We know the stories of the prophets, whales and lion's dens. Prophets In the Old Testament pointed to and helped us see God. They did not point at themselves, prophets ask us to see their miracles, listen to their words, notice injustice and to see God and then respond to God.

In our Scripture for today, John the Baptist is a prophet that is saying something pretty, well, prophetic. "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." John the Baptist is telling us to get ready because someone pretty important is on the way. This is what the season of advent is for and why the writer of Mark went to such pains to point out the prophetic nature of this Scripture, it is saying we need to **get ready for the son of God.**

In these opening verses, we aren't encountering the story of Everyman but that of God's unique son, who spins history on its axis and calls for conversion, a change of heart and mind. Jesus is calling for a response.

John the Baptist is not asking us to live like him, but he is asking us to encounter the Son of God. Every year we are given the gift of Advent. It is five weeks when all we are asked to do is prepare for Jesus Christ.

On this Second Sunday of Advent, John the Baptist is asking us to take a look at our own lives and see how we can better prepare for Jesus' birth? How can we prepare our hearts and minds, homes and communities for the miracle of Christmas? We have five weeks out of every year when all we are asked to do, is to get ready.

Another part of today's service that impresses upon us a need to get ready is today's collect. I know that I tend to skip over the collects for the day during the service, but our collect for today says; "Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer;"

In these 5 weeks we can take a look at our own lives and we can heed the warnings. We can forsake our sins and think about how we can work to love our neighbor and love god in even more significant ways. All so that we can greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ, our redeemer.

And I am excited to tell you that there are many ways we can prepare our selves for Jesus Christ. There are many ways for us to love our neighbor and love God more significantly and one way to show love of God, is to love all that God has created, to love all of Creation. One of the questions we can ask ourselves during Advent this year and every year is, what are we doing to care for all that God has created? What are we doing in our hearts and minds, homes and churches to care for this great Earth that God has created?

I don't think we have to sell everything that we own and live in the woods completely off the grid. But we do have to do something. We are being asked to prepare ourselves, so what are you doing? Seriously, take a second and think about something you have done to care for all that God has created? Have you done anything?

Luckily God understands we aren't perfect and we are given the season of Advent every year to prepare for the coming of the Lord, we are given time to change our hearts, minds and actions.

Now is the time to do something, to pick up a new habit or to drop a bad one that helps protect the planet. We have already asked for forgiveness for what we have done and what we have left undone. It looks like now is the time to do something new.

I also know that the season of Advent can be a little busy. I know I keep thinking that January is a great time to start new things. Maybe I will utilize that gym membership and compost more, in January. But we have been given an entire season in which to prepare for the coming of the Lord. I know, it's almost Christmas, so we don't have time to prepare for the Lord all we have time to do is untangle lights, plan for more family time, tolerate the forced frivolity of the holiday season, shop and wrap presents. What it feels like is that I am entirely too busy to prepare for the coming of the Lord. But unfortunately none of that is the point of Advent. The point of Advent is to prepare for the coming of the Lord. So here we are already 2 Sundays in and what have we done to prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of the Lord?

Advent is the time to find a way to care for creation.

From today's Psalm - I will listen to what the LORD God is saying, for he is speaking peace to his faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to him. Our Scripture, our collect and most importantly our faith are all asking of us the same thing, how can we prepare for the coming of the Lord so that we can greet with Joy the coming of Jesus Christ? Now is the time to prepare and to do something new to care for and protect all that God has created so that we can celebrate with joy the birth of Jesus Christ.