

Second Sunday of Advent: December 10, 2023

Introduction to the day's themes: Still no baby Jesus in Advent. The season begins with expectancy of Jesus' returning at the end of time to set things right. The season continues as John the Baptizer announces that God has shown up as promised; in the person of one so powerful that by comparison the Baptizer declares himself unworthy to even untie his sandals.

Gospel Mark 1:1-8

1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;

3the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,'"

4John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5And 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. 6Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7He 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. 8I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Sermon

People walk miles and miles from city and country side expecting to see the headliner—and they think it's John the Baptizer. He wears prophet's garb and subsists on locusts and wild honey. He calls people to rededicate them-

selves to God's loving intentions for them and for all people. And...John was only the opening act. Randy Bachman and his band might paraphrase the Baptizers words by saying, "You ain't seen nothin' yet".

Mark's opening words tip us off to what's going on. His opening sentence matches the form of royal announcements of kings born, and kings anointed. "The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, Son of God".

Mark spends the remainder of his Gospel demonstrating everyone's bafflement over that one...just who is this one who has mastery over nature, who confronts unseen spiritual powers and who heals illness and disability?

The disciples never quite catch on either. We need Mark's first words to centre us when we're confused, fearful, or even squabbling just like Jesus' first cohort of disciples. Mark quotes Isaiah's words back dated some 800 years- The Good News then and now is "your God is here".

Some 2,800 years after Isaiah announces that the God's presence among a yearning and beleaguered people, we know you can't announce such Good News just once.

Seven in ten Americans describe themselves as spiritual. Not necessarily religious, according to a study released this week from the Pew Centre for Religious Research. The report requires some in depth reading yet the headline suggests that we all look for coherence, meaning and purpose in life. How intensive or extensive is that search? What does a spiritual life look like? Depends on whom you ask I suppose.

For Christians, we remember Mark's starting place: The Good News is that "your God is here". God's ancient promises are being fulfilled now with the person of Jesus— Your God is HERE.