

## **Gospel and Sermon Transcript -2nd Sunday in Advent - December 7, 2025**

The Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew glory to you oh Lord in those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea proclaiming repentance for the kingdom of heaven has come near.

This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said the voice of one crying out in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord make his paths straight.

Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist and his food was locusts and wild honey.

Then Jerusalem and all of Judea and all the region around the Jordan were going out to John and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan confessing their sins.

But when John saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism he said to them you brood of vipers who warned you to flee from the coming wrath.

Therefore bear fruit worthy of repentance and do not presume to say to yourselves we have Abraham as our ancestor.

For I tell you God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees.

Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

I baptize you with water for repentance.

But the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I and I'm not worthy to carry his sandals.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

His winnowing fork is in his hand and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary.

But the chaff will burn with unquenchable fire.

The gospel of our Lord.

## **The Sermon**

Grace and peace to you from the one who was, who is and who is to come.

Imagine somebody calling you a brood of vipers.

I mean we just stick around long enough for the baptism.

Maybe our imaginations can't quite latch on to this John the baptizer and even what he's up to.

I think there are probably enough bombastic and buffoonish people in our world that maybe it's easier just to tune out John the Baptist for a while.

But then again, maybe there was a method to John's madness that he dressed like the prophet Elijah.

In so doing, trying to remind people that maybe they lost their way like the people in Elijah's day had lost their way.

To remind them of who they really were truly, to whom they belong and maybe even where they were headed.

That leads us to Bart practicing geometry without a license.

So Mr. Connor, wherever you are, I hope I am at least close.

Not my best subject in school, if I'm honest.

But I will tell you that as one who makes pots as a hobby, geometry is really a big deal.

As is physics, as is chemistry, and it's delightful to be connected to God's creation in a way where you get to live these things beyond a textbook.

So that brings me to the tangent that we're all going on together.

You know how tangents work.

Think about our advent wreath, that wagon wheel.

It has a hub, maybe some spokes and an outer edge.

Each of those spokes is a tangent, a point on the compass.

And you know how far tangents go? They're infinite.

Oh, you mean like the sermon?

No, no, no. Tangents go into infinity.

And so if you imagine again that wagon wheel, that advent wreath, that the spokes at the hub are close together.

But as you begin to move out, the spokes are farther and farther and farther apart.

So depending on the spoke that you choose to travel, that's going to take you tangentially into a very different place than had you chosen another spoke.

Right?

My friend, the Reverend Dr. Anna Madsen says, what if repentance is not the 180 degree turn?

But it's a couple of notches in a 360 degree compass.

Wouldn't taking a slightly different path even put you in a place radically different in the end?

That's the tangent.

Is Dr. Madsen right?

Perhaps, especially when we think about the literal word for repentance, if I'm saying the Hebrew properly, should.

Which means either to return or to turn.

I like what Frederick Beekner says about repentance.

You've heard me quoted often probably during Lent especially, but maybe now's another good time to remind you

that repentance is not so much that saying I'm sorry and regret.

But it's that catching the vision of what God is up to and responding with, wow,

this is the possibility.

This is the thing that God irresistibly draws us to as we navigate along that spoke, along that tangent line out to that place beyond where we can see right now.

That leads me to talk about Sananam.

I didn't tell the story in the first service. Can I tell it today? You don't mind? A couple extra minutes?

Decades ago, when I was a young, decades ago, when I was a young intern, there was a lady in our congregation named Helen,

who already was well into her 80s and she was a firecracker.

Helen and I worked out this thing, where I was supposed to, about this time of year actually, preaching about sin.

We worked this out so that Helen would stand up in the middle of the worship assembly and in the middle of the sermon and say,

"Young man, what would you have to know about sin?"

Well, we thought it was funny.

My supervising pastor, who usually went along with the hijinks and half the time perpetrated them, said,

"I was worried about Helen. What happened to her? Is she okay?"

Well, pastor, you're older now. What do you know about sin?

Well, I've done enough of it. I should know something.

But I can tell you that the biblical imagination around sin is missing the mark.

So what if you're on a spoke that misses the mark?

Where does that leave you?

Well, when we get together, what do we say sometimes in our confession?

We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbor as ourselves.

And so to be called to repentance is to turn maybe even ever so slightly

and to move into that direction where we are forgiven, we are renewed, we are healed,

and we are led into God's marvelous ways of mercy, love and grace.

A direction that maybe we can't even imagine.

I mean, what does that do to the imagination to hear words like Linda Red,

children playing around rattlesnakes without worry, predators turning to a plant-based diet?

Our imaginations can't see that far out.

And maybe they can't see that far back either to that time of John the Baptizer

or the prophet Isaiah or before him the prophet Elijah

or Moses liberator.

We are just kind of on one little point, aren't we?

Navigating our life along the tangent or the spoke.

So where does that leave us when we can no longer see the hob,

but we can in no way see the ultimate end game that God has in mind?

This brings us to the real world where the predators still are among us.

And it might be wolves, it might be lions, it might be bears, and it might even be people.

And it's very easy from where we're standing to become discouraged.

It's very easy from where we are standing to miss the mark, to aim our trust in a way that doesn't really lead us to God's vision of Shalom.

And what do we do then?

I found great comfort this week actually in the words of the Reverend Mary Ann

Edgar Buddy.

Some of you are familiar with her work.

She is the Dean of Cathedral at the Washington Cathedral in the United States.

About a year ago, trying to do the math, not quite a year ago,

she appealed to a newly elected president to show mercy.

And for her trouble she was told that she was really not a faithful Christian at all

and that she really wasn't a very good pastor and that she was wrong.

Just so you know, she's kind of one of my heroes.

And she said in response, "I refuse to apologize for appealing for mercy."

And lately she said to those of us who struggle in Advent to see behind or ahead or anything,

she said, "Do look around though and look for the people still standing."

And there are examples of people maybe in our personal lives, those people who are still standing.

Maybe you all on a really not very nice weather day,

you're here, you're worshiping, you're engaging the faith, you're still standing.

I mean the grander cases are people like Malala Yososai, you remember her?

Young girls shot by the Taliban because she dared to think that she could get an education.

I love it that she did. I love it that her family moved to the UK.

She has herself a PhD now.

And she is empowering young people and writing books and pointing the way.

There's a stand up kind of a person.

There's a young man in our Senate named Etienne who is distressed about what's

happening with our climate.

And so he's joined with people on occasion to protest.

I'm looking over this direction because you heard this man speak.

So I hope I get the details right.

He was jailed briefly.

And interestingly, it was when he was jailed, something about this kid,

when he was put into remand with other inmates, they kind of adopted him.

They made sure that he had a sandwich to eat, they made sure that his bed was made,

they made sure that he would be safe and cared for while he awaited his turn in front of the magistrate.

That is a stand up kid.

I think about him today because he's brave.

He stood up for what he believed was right.

God blessing and saving the planet and resisting efforts for us to try to counter man that.

So maybe we look for those people who are still standing.

And that reminds us then of where we are walking along that tangent or walking along that spoke to a land that we cannot yet see.

A land where yes indeed.

The lion and the lamb peacefully coexist.

The wolf and the kid.

It's not yet.

We have a long way to go.

And yet to be called to repentance is to be called to turn.

Even if it's our gaze to the things that God is already doing, to the people in whom God is working.

And maybe turning our gaze inward a time or two.

And considering how it is that we can stand when someone needs us to do that.

Descendence of slaves in this country in the United States and in the UK.

Have an image that they live and work with.

And it was articulated by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who said that there is this moral arc, more geometry.

A line that bends.

And the line bends in the direction of justice.

Dr. King's children and grandchildren and the people who follow have taken that quotation of the moral arc of the universe bending to justice and saying, but guess what?

Sometimes we need to be benders of the arc.

We need to be torquing on it and pulling it in that direction.

Maybe we aren't going to be protesters.

Some of us occasionally write a grumpy letter when there's injustice.

Maybe a phone call.

Or maybe it is, I think, especially in this world now.

People are pretty chirpy and tussin', aren't they?

Well, what a great way to resist all of that by just being kind.

Even in the little stuff.

Because sometimes that makes a huge difference.



That one degree just may set things in a whole new life giving direction.

The difficulty in extending that metaphor of the wagon wheel and the compass is that it presupposes that we're the only ones travelling.

And that we are the captain of the ship or at least we're at the wheel, steering wheel, the helm.

This is where we need to shift our gaze again.

To turn our gaze.

And to remember it is God who empowers us to do these things that God so yearns for on this planet, in this world.

Even in this time.

I'm going to offer you a literary quote and yes, it's about lines again.

It's not real scientific, but the image I think is useful.

The writer Andrew Greeley writes, "Sometimes God can take the most crooked of sticks

and still draw a straight line.

Maybe it is in God's geometry. Certainly not ours, but in God's geometry

that we are all being drawn from where we are now

to a grand and glorious future when all things will be restored.

Even in those days when the lines look more like just a plate of spaghetti that got spilled onto the floor.

May God's love find you there.

May God's love encourage you and strengthen you and help you to stand.

Amen.