

Second Sunday in Advent ♦ December 6, 2020

Mark 1:1-8

Submitted by Dr. Rosemary Murphy

Part of our appreciation for God's creation is its cyclical nature and the changes that come with the rhythms of the seasons. While winters do not seem to be as cold as in the "good old days," the darkness of shorter days and, with windows closed, more inside activities, and the restrictions of Covid-19, life seems quieter—with the exception of Packer Sundays!!!

In our Catholic faith tradition, and in some other Christian traditions as well, there is a beauty in the liturgical cycle that parallels the rhythms of winter, spring, summer and fall. For people of faith, despite what can often be a very busy time, Advent parallels winter's slower, stiller mood. This year particularly it offers precious time for reflection and prayerfulness in our break from the normal comings and goings of the Christmas season.

The theme of the First Sunday of Advent was to be alert and watchful. Nearly 2,000 years after Jesus walked this earth, we are still awaiting his promised return in glory when he will establish God's kingdom in its fullness. Today's Good News comes from John the Baptist who, for first-century followers of "the Way" as well as today's Christians, offers a path to discipleship. Three messages of Mark's Gospel (1:1-8) are clear: First, John the Baptist made a proclamation for significant importance. Second, John the Baptist's role was to herald the coming of the "stronger one;" and third, John the Baptist invited all his followers to respond to his announcement by repenting their sins and changing their behavior as they prepared to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

For ancient people, proclamations were the media for important information. They would understand that "The beginning of the good news of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1) meant that because of his lineage as the Son of God, Jesus had the qualities of God, was divine, and could speak and act as his Father.

Because of his honorable personal status as the Son of God, Jesus was a Messiah of great power, his was the long-awaited "stronger one." He was coming on his Father's authority to save God's people. Those who heard John the Baptist's message and were baptized were called to respond to the good news. As members of "the Way," they were to respond in discipleship. Their path to acceptance of the Messiah was a change of heart, repentance for their sins and the baptism of the Holy Spirit by "the stronger one," Jesus Christ.

Today, like those first-century Christians, John the Baptist's proclamation calls us to faith in a powerful coming Savior who will restore the harmony of all creation and bring us back to the relationship with God that we lost through sin. Every day as we repent, ask forgiveness, and strive to know and do God's will, we are blessed by "the stronger one," the honorable One who suffered and died out of love for us