

December 10, 2017

Is 40:1-5,9-11; 2 Pt 3:8-14; Mk 1:1-8

Through human history people have been crying out to God to be saved, to be liberated from injustice, to be comforted. The prophet Isaiah in our first reading speaks the thoughts of God: *Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated* - in other words: “be comforted my people, I’m going to do something.” All those voices of people crying out through history for a savior are finally answered by the voice of the final prophet: John the Baptist. John doesn’t just tell of God’s wishes and promise, he cries back too the people with an immediate response. *In the desert prepare the way of the Lord!* In the midst of our desert, in the midst of loneliness, in the midst of emptiness - God says he will *give comfort* and *speak tenderly*. To us living in a world that can be unfair, that is uneven, where there seems to always be one more obstacle, one more thing pulling us down, God says: *Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley*. This voice cries out to all of us - can we help to bring down the mountains and hills that get in the way of God’s coming to us? Can we help to prepare a highway for our God to come to us?

We are in the early part of the season of Advent where we are preparing to commemorate one of the great comings of God in human time. When in the womb of Mary God took human flesh as Jesus Christ was born in a stable in Bethlehem and lived among humans - as a human, yet still as God. God is coming in another great way at the end of human time as well. However, between Jesus coming in the incarnation, and his final coming in glory on the last day, there have been and will continue to be innumerable comings of the Lord that are less dramatic - and they happen in many different ways. The people of ancient times calling out to God for a savior were picturing a great military leader to powerfully pull them from their situation - God came as a little baby - the way God comes is not always the way we expect. God comes to us in our prayer, God comes in words and actions of others, God comes to us in the events of life. Each time we approach the Eucharist it is like Jesus is knocking at the door and asking if we have room inside for him to be born in us as he was born in the stable in Bethlehem. As you approach can you hear the voice of John the Baptist: *Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths*.

Advent reminds us that we need to keep that path, or “way”, or “road” between us and God open. We should hear the voice of John the Baptist coming from the desert calling us to let go of the pride,

resentments, and angers that take space in our heart. We are called by him to repentance and seeking forgiveness of sin so that we clean out space for the presence of God. The more you say “Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul will be healed,” and really want to be healed, and really want him to come under your roof - the more Jesus will spend time in your heart. God has heard the cries of people all through time to be saved, and in God’s great love for us and in the depths of the God’ heart says to us: *Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.* God takes flesh in stable in Bethlehem to be able to have a body to be sacrificed for our sins and save us in a way that erases any things the world can do to us. It doesn’t matter if God changes a situation that we want to be taken away in the short term. Opening the way to eternal life is the final and definitive way that God makes *every valley ... be filled in, [and] every mountain and hill ... made low.* For all people, for all times.

Although Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem was a one time event in our human time, it is a continuing event in God’s time. Peter tells us in the second reading: *with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day.* For God the coming to his people did not just happen on a specific day, for God, where there is no “before” or “after” - just “NOW” - this coming of God to save the people is always a present reality. You don’t miss it if you happened to not be there 2000 years ago. When God says through John the Baptist *prepare the way of the Lord* he is speaking to the people who cried out to God for a savior thousands of years earlier, he is speaking to those who would meet Jesus in the flesh while he lived and preached in Palastine, he speaks to all who would approach him in the Eucharist through all the centuries, he is speaking to us - to you , and you, and you - who have called out to God in your need. You can receive this coming of God at any time - prepare the way! Advent calls us to prepare a path for Jesus to be born in our lives again, and again, and again, and to take care of the things that we are unable to - and he will by the way! I can’t tell you of all the problems, worries, and situations I though were impossible that God took care of either by changing the situation or by getting me thorough it. If we clear the mountains and hills of the things that separate us from receiving Jesus, then he will go even farther and clear those other mountains that are in our way to fulfillment, or if the mountain bus remain he will give us the strength and support to climb or go around the mountain. With a pathway open to God we will be comforted, we will be led ... and finally ... saved.