

**Advent 2: Year "B": Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2Peter 3:8-15; Mark1:1-8**

**Title: Come Lord Jesus**

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Question: If Jesus were to show up at your door, would you invite him into your house for supper and conversation? Would you invite him to be your overnight guest?

For all of us, I'm sure the answer would be a resounding 'of course! Maybe we would make him comfortable while we discretely ran around the house making sure it was presentable and maybe sure that the guest bath was in order -- but we'd be thrilled beyond measure and delighted to have Jesus as our guest.

But a little more difficult question might be: If John the Baptist were to show up, would you invite HIM into your house for supper and conversation, and would you then extend to John the Baptist the hospitality of your guest room? After all Jesus himself said to John the Baptist, "there is no one greater this side of heaven."

Now I caution: You might not want to be too quick to answer for even though John the Baptist would seem to be one of the lead characters here at the season of Advent he was, if nothing else, dirty and smelly. He was uncultured and uneducated. He lived in the desert. He ate not from fine restaurants, nor even foods purchased at the local Discount Food Market. He lived on insects he could find to eat, locusts, and by raiding beehives of their honey. He wore animal skins for clothing. In short, we might be inclined to say he was sort of a wild character.

And maybe most condemning of all - he was what we would surely call a religious fanatic. He talked about religion, it seemed, all the time. And the talk, more like tirades really, was of the most fundamental sort. "Repent,!" he would say. Repent of your evil ways. You son-of-a-snake, change your ways and quit acting like you never heard of God, or Torah, God's word.

And John was an unabashed Bible thumper. He quoted the Bible incessantly. Prepare the way of the Lord, he would say. Quoting from Isaiah Chapter 40, verse 3 he would say, make his paths straight. And he constantly invited folk into the river for a good ole down-home, no messing around baptism by immersion in living, that is to say, the moving waters of a river or stream.

But my friends, the question really is not would we invite John the Baptist into our homes. The question is, can we make room for the message of John the Baptist in our theology and can we make room in our lives for the one of whom John said he was "not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals?" That is the question. Can we, do we, make room for

the teachings of the prophets, and most importantly, do we make room for God, Jesus the Christ, the Holy Spirit in our lives?

We all lead busy lives. The irony is that as we approach Christmas, rather than making space for the coming of the Christ child and all that that means, we are ever so tempted to let the busyness of the season push the Christ off into a corner where he might be rendered blessedly pedestrian, if not invisible.

And though the pace around us seems to quicken, the culture seems to not know why. We live in a time when the Christian liturgical season of Christmas is reduced to 'the holiday season' – complete not with Christmas greeting cards but rather holiday cards, holiday sales, and holiday decorations.

Believe me I am all for inclusiveness, I celebrate diversity, and I am not unaware that we live in a pluralistic society, and that is a good, not a bad thing. But dear ones, Jesus is the reason for the season.

The world around us seems to be in a great hurry to get to Christmas. It's like the Grinch who tried to steal Christmas is alive and well and actually among us. Yet, the church is in no great hurry to get there. With the wisdom of the centuries, our tradition tells us that the journey is what we need as much as the benefit of finally reaching that stable outside of Bethlehem.

Our tradition, our Christian tradition, asks us to pause, to take stock, to step back from the busyness of our lives, to empty our hearts so as to make room for the birth of something new and of ultimate importance.

John himself was a man who was obsessed it would seem. By all accounts, John was a very busy man. But let us notice and let us never forget that mostly what John was busy doing was pointing to Jesus. John says it is not I you are to look to but the one who is to come. It is not I you want to model your life after. It is the one who is to come.

John was sort of a battering ram for Jesus. John was the one whom God assigned the task of shaking us out of our complacency. John was the one whom God called to say, "You know, if you have not God's peace in your life, you have no life at all."

John was the one whom God called to say to us, "Whatever you have made an idol in life, it will not satisfy."

John was the one whom God called to say, "You know, back there when Moses gave us the commandment to not worship false gods, he was speaking not only of foreign gods, or maybe bronze statues, and certainly not a golden calf -- he was speaking of anything in our lives we turn into a god or thus replacing the real, the authentic God of our experience.

We can make an idol of anything. Our job. Our hobbies. Our relationships. Our wealth. Our need to be right.

Not any of these or any such things are negatives in and of themselves, but they are poor substitutes for a relationship with the holy, nor are they much of a substitute for being in relationship with one another.

And so as we continue through this season of Advent, let us do so being reminded that God is ever calling us to new things and to greater relationship with God and the things of God.

We may not know, in fact we do not know, what the new thing will look like, no more than when God called Abraham to leave his home to journey to a new land. Abraham knew not where the journey would lead, but he was faithful in his response. Abraham made room for God to speak to him, to guide him towards the new thing that God had in store.

This too is the message of Advent. God is ever calling us to go where he will lead – even if we know not the destination.

We are called to hear the voice of the holy in our lives. And we are called in this parish to hear the voice of holy God calling us to who God would have us be and the directions he would have us – not only in our personal lives but also as the church of Jesus Christ – both in this time of pandemic and beyond.

Advent is a call to make room for the new things that God would call us to. To greater obedience, greater love, greater connectedness with God's call on our lives, and to greater means of hearing that voice. The voice of one crying in the wilderness? Certainly. But also the voice of one calling us out of the wilderness-type places in our own lives.

Let this Advent be a time of listening. Let this Advent be a time of healing. Let this Advent be a time of hearing God's voice.

Repentance? Yes. But we repent of the old ways not only so as to symbolically and spiritually erase the past, but also that we might make room for the future. We repent not for the sake of repenting, but rather to prepare the way, to make straight the path that leads to new life and a new thing. For you see, dear ones, we are not just called to await the Day of the Lord, but to participate in the paving of it.

And so let us not be in a hurry, but rather let us enjoy, and savor, and be participants in the journey - all the while listening to God's voice. Repenting where necessary. Forgiving when necessary. Praying unceasingly as the Apostle Paul says.

But let us do none of these things in a spirit of frenzy, but rather in a spirit of contemplation, holiness, and charity - remembering that the journey is almost always as important as the destination.

I leave you this morning with a poem - a poem that speaks of such things. A poem simply entitled *Advent* by Christina Rossetti.

"Come," thou does say to the Angels  
    To blessed Spirits, "Come."  
"Come," to the Lambs of Thine Own flock.  
    Thy little ones, "Come home."  
"Come," from the many mansions house  
    The gracious word is sent,  
"Come," from the ivory places  
    Unto the Penitent.  
O Lord, restore us deaf and blind,  
    Unclose our lips tho' dumb.  
*Then* say to us, "I come with speed,"  
    And will answer, "Come."

Amen