



***Third Sunday Advent***

***Isaiah 35: 1-6, 10 James 5: 7-10, Matthew 11: 2-11***

Advent is a time of waiting. James tells us that it is a time of patience. Patience means calm endurance or perseverance.

James uses the farmer as a model of patience. You can't hurry the seasons of the year. You can't hurry the gestation period for plants or livestock. He tells us to steady our hearts. This image suggests that our hearts are like an impatient horse that needs to be quietened. It suggests that we need to harness our energies so that we make good use of our talents. Impatience leads to grumbling and grumbling leads to a loss of purpose.

Isaiah uses the theme of land. He describes that extraordinary sight after rain falls on a desert. Almost miraculously flowers appear, the parched land returns thanks for the gift of water. Such a sight is a small glimpse of the transforming presence of God.

In the presence of such overwhelming grace there is no room for fear, for weak knees or trembling hands. This is the message that we have been slow to learn. God is not a God of fear. God is a God of strength. The strength of God is not a threat but an encouragement.

So, be open! Look, listen, dance and sing. These are the signs of God's activity. The infirmities that have imprisoned the spirit have been replaced by a joy that liberates. More than five hundred years later another prophet, John, hears rumours. Something is happening which brings hope. He sends one of his disciples to check it out.

They ask, "Are you the expected one?"

Jesus answers, "Go and tell what you hear and see."

The blind recover their sight, Lepers are cured. The deaf hear. The dead are raised. Each of these healings points to restoration. What was broken is mended. The presence of the kingdom of God was not to be found in huge signs and wonders but in the lives of ordinary people. Just recently we have followed the story of a very young child who was the victim of an accident that left her burnt. Little by little some healing has taken place. This is as much a sign of the kingdom as a mustard seed. Physical healings are a reminder of the need for emotional and spiritual healings. The past leaves its wounds and some of them have not been attended to. Jesus calls us to wholeness. This is why we need to begin by dealing with the fear.

The poor have the Good News preached to them. At the beginning of his ministry Jesus quotes Isaiah (61) where the same signs of the new age are given.

“Glad tidings to the poor” is also the greeting of the Christmas angel. The glad tidings that we have received are the message of our dignity, our status as the beloved of God. As disciples we are invited to pass the message on.

Many of the messages we receive from society, and even religious sources are life-denying. “You can’t be happy unless you have this or that.” “If you prosper it is because you are good.” “God is angry, you deserve punishment.” “It is God’s will that you suffer.” All of these messages are a mockery of the message of Jesus.

Jesus whose name means “God saves” told us to accept the unconditional love of God. God’s love is a free gift. These are the messages that we listen to and heed.

Spring cleaning allows the house to recover its freshness and be restored. Advent is an opportunity to let go anything that dulls the spirit and brings us to a new year with the promise that “sorrow and mourning will flee” to be replaced by joy and gladness.

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