

II Advent

December 7, 2014

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Isaiah 40:1-11

2 Peter 3:8-15a

Mark 1:1-8

Last week I suggested that we take over the meaning of Christmas lights, regardless of their source: from the nose of a reindeer, or on a sleigh, or maybe from a star on a manger scene. We agreed to think: 'The light of Christ: Thanks be to God'. I have another symbol for us to take over, from a street sign...

During the season of Advent, most of our focus is on remembering the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem; we have visions of the angels who would appear to shepherds and wise men, announcing the birth of the Messiah. But today we see that another dimension of Jesus' coming is being announced by John the Baptist; he was preaching about people letting the Messiah come into their hearts; into OUR hearts. This teaching was about each individual inviting the one who is coming, who would baptize with the Holy Spirit, to be our ultimate Spiritual Director in helping us to live into God's purpose, and not our own.

John lived in the desert, and came out of the desert to preach and teach. Many believe he was part of the Essene community that lived in caves in the dessert, as a rejection of the corruption in the religious life in Jerusalem. Those caves are where the ancient Qumran scrolls were found in the 1950s. John lived off the land in the desert, eating locusts and wild honey and wearing animal skins instead of woven textiles, to signify his rejection of the trappings of civilization. John announced that he was preparing the way for another one who would be coming soon to lead followers out of the wilderness. His audience could certainly relate to that idea of living in the wilderness; their forbearers had spent forty years in the physical wilderness, in search of the Promised Land. During that time they were also very much in search of their own identity as the People of God; not just a group of escaped slaves from Egypt; not just offspring of Abraham; but finding the way, discovering God's highway: the King's Highway: El Camino Real; out of the wilderness, into a faithful and worshipping community, following God who had become their Great Shepherd.

I like the challenge of this theme for continuing our own journey through THIS 2014 Advent; John is challenging all people – challenging you and me

– First, that part of our faith journey is to face our own wilderness journey of exclusion, or conflict, or crisis, or sin, that pulls our attention away from God being first in our life. Secondly, there is no ‘finding our own way’ out of that wilderness. We cannot trust only in ourselves. We have Christ and we have his Holy Spirit to give us the awareness when we wander off God’s highway, and empowering us to do the work of changing direction and getting back on The King’s Highway.

A French Jesuit theologian named Jean Danielou said this: “Since the coming of Christ goes on forever – He is always He who is to come in the world and in the Church – There is always an Advent going on.”

The lesson from John the Baptist is that you and I need to prepare for the daily coming of Jesus into our lives. How do we PREPARE for that daily arrival of Jesus into our life? Well, there is certainly Bible reading, private prayer during your commute time, and reading stories about faith-filled people who can inspire your faith life.

All of those things should have a place in our life. But the most important influence for me, the strongest reminder to hold my life open for God to be at work in me, has been from people who demonstrate faith at work. This is not necessarily the people who preach faith, but people who show faith at work. I’m talking about YOU, as you share with me the way you live out your faith, and I share with you how I live out my faith.

We support each other through worshipping together, doing Holy Eucharist together, praying, listening, sharing, crying, laughing and caring for each other; using our resources as a faith family to meet people’s needs in Africa and downtown San Jose, and for each other.

Our commitment as a faith family includes sharing our journey down the road that life puts us on, but having trusted company when the road gets rough, or even when we feel like we’ve gotten lost in the wilderness. John the Baptist brings us a reminder that the church’s theme of Advent is important all year long, to keep us on the King’s Highway, with good company, and relying on Christ to be our map and compass. Remember the challenge from John, as you see signs for El Camino Real: God’s Highway.

I pray that all of us have the opportunity to share **what it is like to travel God’s highway** with people we meet during this holy season of Advent!
Amen.