

Year B Advent 2 Constant Course Corrections Required Mark 1 verses 1 to 8

Today, Mark gets straight to the point...this is the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mark doesn't mess around with Mary and Joseph and the little baby Jesus. He doesn't talk about shepherds in the field listening to angels singing. There's no mention of King Herod or the wise men...none of that. Mark cuts to the heart of the matter. The little baby Jesus is all grown up and this is the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Except that Mark doesn't start his story with Jesus Christ. He starts with Isaiah - a prophet who lived nearly 600 years before Mark's story begins. Isaiah announced that God would send a messenger to prepare the way for the Messiah, to get people ready for his coming and, right on cue, John the Baptist enters the scene. Mark is leaving absolutely nothing up to the imagination of his hearers. It's like he's giving away the ending when he's just getting started...he's already said that Jesus is the Son of God - the Messiah they've been waiting for - and he also makes it clear that John the Baptist is the one whom Isaiah was talking about in the Scriptures - the one who would announce the coming of the Messiah.

So Mark has managed to put us and his hearers into the same place in the story. We already know that Jesus is the Son of God. We already know that God sent John the Baptist to announce the coming of Jesus. We are waiting for our Messiah just like they were waiting. And it struck me as I read through this gospel earlier this week that John's message means just as much to us now as it did to his listeners nearly 2000 year ago. We can hear John's words today with just as much hope and joy as his listeners did so very long ago.

To understand John's message, we need to start at "the beginning" just like Mark does. Mark's use of the words, "the beginning" is a very deliberate echo of how the whole story of salvation got started in the first place...in the very first words of *Genesis* - "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." God spoke and there was light; waved His hand and put the sun, moon, and stars in place; blew the sea back and created dry land; and sculpted the living creatures into existence. In the beginning, God created, and it was good.

Now it is the beginning, all over again - the beginning of good news, about a whole new creation God is creating for you and for me. It is not a creation that involves sand and sea, trees and sky. This new creation doesn't give birth to another universe. It gives birth to a Kingdom and new lives.

God is creating salvation, a restoration of everything sin has stolen from us and broken in us, a remaking of who we are. He is creating an opportunity for healing, forgiveness, and freedom. The Lord is making a road for those far away to become sons and daughters. He is unleashing grace that can redeem everything sin destroyed, making all things new.

This new creation is all wrapped up in the one John is announcing - Jesus Christ. In him are all of the promises of God - our redemption, our new life in God's kingdom. In order to be a part of this new life, we must do what John says...Repent.

Repentance isn't what we normally think about at this time of year when we're surrounded by the beautiful lights and decorations of Christmas and the happy Christmas carols playing everywhere...but, we

should be. Repentance is, of course, a topic that pops up more than once in our *Gospel* readings throughout the year and, I know I have shared its meaning before but it is worth hearing again. To repent doesn't just mean to feel badly for the wrong things we've done and repent doesn't mean just saying "sorry". Repent comes from a *Greek* word that means, to change your mind and to turn around..."to think differently after". It means a complete change of attitude. It means a turning away from the things in life that separate us from *God* - bad habits, our busyness, baggage we cling to. It means turning away from the upside-down values of the world - power, wealth, social position. It means turning to *God* - reorienting our lives so that *God* is front and centre. It means loving *God* so that all of our words and actions are a result of that love.

Repentance isn't simple and it isn't easy - to always hold *God* in our thoughts, to always have every word and action flow from *God*, to always reflect *God*, to be *God's* image. Repentance is like flying a jumbo jet. The pilot puts the jet on autopilot so that it flies the course by itself but, the jet's computer is constantly taking note of where the jet is and is constantly making adjustments, course corrections, so that the jet continues on the right path. That's what we need to be doing...constantly making course corrections so that we stay on the right path -turned toward *God* and what *God* wants. Repentance is constant and ongoing. It's not easy but *God* said he would help us.

To understand how *God* helps us with that, we need to go back, once again, to the prophets who spoke long before John arrived on the scene. This time we turn to *Jeremiah*. *God* told *Jeremiah* that the

time would come when He would make a new covenant with the people. It would be different from the old covenant.... God said, "I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts." When God first gave His law to His people, it was written on stone tablets that Moses brought down from the mountain. We've learned that the people were able to follow the laws without truly loving God - everything was for show on the outside and they didn't have the right attitude on the inside. Jesus came to change that and John was getting them, and us, ready.

The path John calls out to straighten is the path to our heart. The way John tells us to prepare is the way inside of us - inside our deepest, darkest places and once we are there, we are to turn around - to repent - to face Jesus as he comes to us, to turn to God and learn to make our wants into what God wants.

John tells us that he baptizes with water but Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works in us and changes us from the inside out. The Holy Spirit writes God's law on our hearts - the law of love. Today we place ourselves in John's sandals and cry, Repent! First within ourselves as we turn our hearts, minds, bodies, and souls toward God, and then we continuously make our course corrections to keep God front and centre as we draw others into the joy and hope of repentance. Today we rejoice in the hope of a new beginning - the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.