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Mark 1:1-8

Let Heaven and Nature Sing: Wind

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Mark 1:1-8 (New Revised Standard Version)

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  make his paths straight,’” John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

This Advent we are highlighting each of the elements. We are calling it Let Heaven and Nature Sing: an elemental advent. Last week as we talked about Jesus’ return at the end of time, we talked about our earth and how our earth is broken. We talked about Michael Brown killed in Ferguson and 9 year old Tamir Rice killed in a park in Cleveland holding a toy gun. We talked about how 1 in 3 black males born today can expect to spend time in prison during his lifetime.[[1]](#footnote-1) And I shared with you the facebook post from Benjamin Watson, tight end for the New Orleans Saints where he says in America we don’t have a skin problem, we have a sin problem. He said, “SIN is the reason we rebel against authority. SIN is the reason we abuse our authority. SIN is the reason we are racist, prejudiced and lie to cover for our own. SIN is the reason we riot, loot and burn.”[[2]](#footnote-2) And he said that it is the gift of God becoming one of us in Jesus that is a solution for sin. It is Jesus that can transform our heart and our mind to know that every human being is a beloved child of God. It is the Gospel that gives us hope.

This week I have been in prayer for our country. My heart has broken for Ronin Shimizu, a 12-year-old middle school student in Folsom, California who committed suicide this week after relentless anti-gay bullying because Ronin was on the cheerleading squad last year. My heart has broken for Eric Garner’s family. Black lives matter. And I have wept as I have seen reminders of Eric Garner’s last words as he was placed in a fatal chokehold, “I can’t breathe.” This week our focus for our elemental advent is air. And when I think of air I think of breath and spirit and God’s Holy Spirit with us. “I can’t breathe.” And I think of our African-American brothers and sisters, especially brothers, in this country who are more likely to be arrested more likely to be executed, more likely to be killed. “I can’t breathe.” Our justice system is broken and we need God.

Sometimes our world just seems hopeless. It has been 2000 years since Jesus came and it boggles my mind to think of how many injustices have existed in those 2000 years. The Crusades, slavery, World Wars, genocide, inequality, women unable to vote, but over time God has helped us to muddle our way through to make it better. God has helped us to make great strides and we will continue. No matter what dark corner we get ourselves into, God will find us and help lead us out.

It may seem hopeless but Advent shows us that it never is because God finds us. Advent is a reminder to us that God is always with us in our places of vulnerability, openness and need.[[3]](#footnote-3) Jesus is with all who are hurting today. Jesus is with us crying out for justice today. Advent is a time for us to prepare our hearts with prayer and contemplation for Jesus’ coming.

I have to be honest with you. Christmas stresses me out. There are so many expectations that I place on myself to not only get all the presents, but to get the perfect present and to wrap it myself. And then the Christmas cards, oh, the Christmas cards! Sometimes as I drive by looking at people’s Christmas lights I wonder about the family inside. Is their house overwhelmed with anxiety? Have they maxed-out their credit cards to have a “perfect” Christmas? How many of you are overwhelmed at Christmas? We know that Christmas is all about giving: giving presents, giving Christmas cards. And we do all of this giving because God gave God’s Son to us at Christmas, but I wonder if we can see Christmas as a time of receiving. Receiving the gift of love, receiving the gift of peace. Opening our hearts, opening ourselves to the love of God. Opening ourselves to the breath of God, the Holy Spirit. Opening ourselves up to be changed, to be filled with love and acceptance, to accept ourselves as God’s precious child. Opening ourselves up to be transformed by God to be able to see God’s image in our fellow human beings, in our brothers and sisters in Christ.

John the Baptist was the miracle child of Elizabeth and Zechariah and he was probably expected to follow in the footsteps of his father and become a Temple priest. But he didn’t do what was expected. John the Baptist went out into the rivers, to the desert, to the people, calling them to baptism to symbolize a reoriented heart. “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” God is on the move. There is no mountain or hill or ritual or law that can get in God’s way. And repentance, making a 180 degree turn, means following God’s priorities not ours. It means worrying more about preparing our lives rather than preparing the Christmas cards. It means working to dismantle racism and injustice, it means seeing God’s image in our black brothers.[[4]](#footnote-4)

“Prepare the way of the Lord” means making room in our lives and in our churches for those whom Jesus made room for, for the poor, the uneducated, the immigrants and the marginalized. Do you hear the voice crying from the wilderness? Crying for justice, crying in pain? God is coming to us! Which is fantastic news, and God is coming whether we are ready or not. If we want to get ready for God we have to confess our sins, get baptized, repent and believe in the Good News! And God is coming whether we do those things or not, but knowing God is on the way, why wouldn’t we want to do them?[[5]](#footnote-5)

When was the last time you played hide-and-seek? I love hide-and-seek. Everyone hides and tries not to get caught, but eventually everyone gets found. You would not think that the hiding part is very fun. If you ask most children, “Do you want to sit somewhere all by yourself and keep very quiet for a long time?” they are not very interested. What is fun about hide-and-seek is not hiding, but getting found. Everyone likes to be found. Today God is coming to find us. “Prepare the way of the Lord!” is as though God is calling to us, “Ready or not, here I come!” And may we remember, this is the God who always finds us.[[6]](#footnote-6)

1. http://www.naacp.org/pages/criminal-justice-fact-sheet [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.cbsnews.com/news/nfl-players-facebook-post-on-ferguson-darren-wilson-michael-brown-decision-goes-viral/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.davidlose.net/2014/11/advent-1-b/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://rachelheldevans.com/blog/lectionary-advent-2-uneven-ground [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\_id=2266 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. hide-and-seek analogy found at: https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\_id=2266 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)