

Second Sunday of Advent
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
Rev. Jason Glombicki
December 10, 2017

Mark's gospel is frustrating. The beginning is odd and the ending, well, the ending isn't really an ending at all. Throughout this liturgical year, we'll try to figure out if the Jesus we "know" is Mark's Jesus. You see, each of the four Gospel's take a different approach to Jesus. We just finished working through Matthew who went out of his way to hammer home that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah and the new Moses. Yet, Mark takes a different approach. And we know Mark is going to be different from the second verse when we hear of the prophets. With our attention on the prophets, we meet John the Baptist, and we notice that he acts, talks, and dresses like, well, a prophet from the Hebrew Scriptures.

But, what is a prophet? Any ideas? A prophet is someone who speaks God's words or teaches in God's name. A prophet is neither a fortune-teller nor a forecaster of the future.¹ As one scholar puts it, "[Prophets] are analyzers of the "now" for the sake of moving toward a different future."² You see, prophets tell of what will likely happen if the way in which we trod remains the same.

¹ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2015/10/09/a-big-list-of-prophets-from-the-bible/>

² <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3446>

To help us understand better understand the present, John the Baptist called for individual repentance. That is the same work we did here together before Mila's baptism. Here we renounced our participation with the powers of the world that oppose God's will. Not only the powers in which we actively engage, but also the ones we participate in unintentionally. In case you said those words earlier without thinking about it, take a moment to think about how you've participated with the powers of the world that oppose God's will. You can even write down your thoughts on some open space in the bulletin. (Who wants to be vulnerable and share?)

One way that I participate with powers of the world that oppose God's will is when I actively or passively use my privilege. I use privilege when I let something innate about myself carry power over someone else's natural characteristics. I use my privilege when I let my skin color, my gender, my age, my nationality, or my socio-economic status favor my presence over another's. We can see the abuse of privilege in our tax "reform," sexual violence, and racism. Since Mark's Gospel made clear that God's will is for us to love and treat our neighbors as ourselves,³ then receiving a more favorable outcome than another as a result of privilege is in opposition to God's will.

Today, we heard John the Baptist prophetically called us to recognize how we participate in that which opposes to God's will. It is not a popular or comfortable thing to

³ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+12%3A28-31>

do, but it is an important task. We must learn to recognize reality and truth before we can be open to God working something new in us.

And, if you ask me, I think we need more prophets in the world. We need truth-tellers. We need people willing to speak truth to the powerful. We need people willing to give of themselves for the good of others. We need to recognize that being a follower of Christ does not mean becoming a star, but rather it means taking on the form of a servant.

You see, in Mark's gospel, we meet a different type of Jesus. There was no baby in a manger and there was no resurrected man eating with his friends. Instead, in Mark, Jesus rejected all forms of violence and pride, and principally communicated God's presence through acts of love and service.

Friends, that's the truth. In Mark, our God entered the scene not in the temple or a stable, we didn't find God in a family tree or on the sea, instead we found our God in the barren, vulnerable, wilderness with the truth-tellers. It was there that Jesus began his work in the stark reality of a broken world. Jesus walked into the world to fill us with God's spirit and to set us free to be world-changing, truth-telling, and new-life-seeking followers of a loving God.

I wonder if we can see God's presence in the midst of our own brokenness. Take a moment to think about where you have experienced God's presence in truth-filled vulnerability? (Who wants to share?)

For me, I find God's presence in my humanity. In these weeks before Christmas and the end of the year, everything feels rushed. There is a lot to wrap up, both literally and figuratively. Yet, I'm reminded that I am an imperfect human striving to embody God's

will. According to today's Gospel, that is the precise moment where God appears and begins to transform all things. It's in the moments where we vulnerably recognize our limitations that we are often more aware of God's life-giving presence. It is in those moments when I know that what I need most is God's call to embrace my limitations at the font, and God's welcome to this table of strength and grace. Here, I see God's presence gathered in this assembly of truth-tellers.

Now, we go to embrace God's prophetic truth. We go looking at the present with all that we wish to forget, *and* we go with hope knowing that our God is found among that truth. That is focus of the Advent season. That is just the beginning of Mark's good news. Thanks be to God. Amen.