

2nd Sunday of Advent, Year C

A Sermon Preached by Sr Greta Ronningen

on December 8, 2024

Baruch 5:1-9 / Canticle 16 / Philippians 1:3-11 / Luke 3:1-6

Here we are again – it is the second Sunday of Advent just 2 ½ weeks from Christmas and our Gospel reading is focused on the wild man John the Baptist. This larger-than-life character is stirring up the crowds in anticipation of the one who is to come. We aren't reading about the Holy Night to come or even searching for an inn – oh no! We good Episcopalians we know better than to rush Christmas or God Forbid sing Jingle Bells before Dec 24th! We have to sit in the anticipation of the coming of Christ and certainly not rejoice yet!

Our monastic friends don't even put up a tree until Christmas eve, but I have a confession to make. Brother Dennis and I start playing Christmas carols at Thanksgiving! Yes, we are naughty monks who love Christmas before Christmas and like much of the world are less enthusiastic in the actual season of Christmas which is the twelve days after Christmas that lead to Epiphany. In fact, our tree is usually so dry by Dec 28 that it may not make it to New Years!

We are ok with being naughty in this way. Just don't tell our big brothers at the Order of Holy Cross!

The Gospel of Luke begins with the story of John the Baptist. This wonderful wild character, maybe the most colorful of anyone in the bible, is the prophet who leads his disciples into a baptism of repentance. He wanted his disciples to change in preparation for the one who is coming. He did not mess around; he took folks into the Jordan River and surely gave them a good dunking!

The word repent is a translation for the Greek word Metanoia. Repent is used 66 times in the New Testament so it was clearly an important concept. But repent is a terrible translation for the word Metanoia. Jesus and John use this word,

metanoia frequently but what they are actually saying is to turn around, see with new eyes, or have a spiritual awakening. Metanoia is not saying you have been wrong and need to be forgiven, it is more a complete 360 in your point of view. It is an invitation - not shaming. It isn't saying you are bad and now you will be good it is saying wake up and get right with God.

I had a big metanoia moment in my life. I was trying to get enough money in the bank so I would be secure and be able to focus on God. I felt that I needed like a million dollars to rest easy. I kid you not. I was actually in a situation where this could happen – I would make a million dollars, but the person was counting on was becoming abusive to me. He was belittling me and accusing me of being a liar. I was broke so I felt trapped in this toxic situation.

One Sunday after services I decided to go to the side chapel where there were prayer teams offering individual private prayers. I got onto my knees and let two complete strangers wrap their hands around mine as they listened to my distress. I told them how horrible this man was being to me and how scared I was. When I was done, they prayed for me to see God in him. Which pissed me off. But something was happening as our hands were shaking and they seemed very intense. All of a sudden, I felt a jolt of energy come shooting into me through our hands and I sort of fell back and away from them. I started to sort of laugh/cry and knew the world was never going to be the same after this. I felt free – free – free. I wanted to raise my hands up in the air and holler with joy but of course we Episcopalians do not do this. I wished for this once I was in a charismatic church and could have been dramatic!

I was free to walk away from this difficult person. I was free to reimagine myself. I was free to make God the center of my life right now and forever. I had had my metanoia experience, and I was prepared for the Lord.

I think my sin was the idolatry of money. My metanoia or repentance was the awareness that I could not serve God and money. I was no longer clinging to security – I was going to focus on serving God and trust that I would have enough.

And sure enough within a week I met Brother Dennis who opened the doors to my vocation as a prison chaplain.

Ever since that moment my life has expanded and become more and more meaningful.

I love John and his baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. I guess we shouldn't skip over it after all. Maybe we could all find new ways to metanoia or see with new eyes in preparation for the coming of Christ. It is an important step in our new liturgical year.

Let us all prepare by turning to the Lord with all our hearts. Let nothing be more compelling than our embrace of the Divine Presence.

This is the season we sing together, Come o Come Emanuel. Inviting God to be with us. Let us all take our time in Advent – anticipating the coming of Christ into our lives into our hearts and not rush to the big day, no matter when we hear Holy Night.

Let us slow down, open our hearts, and invite Christ to be born into our lives again this Christmas.