



Sunday December 6, 2020  
Mark 1:1-8 (Second Sunday in Advent)

Pastor Tony Acompanado

I don't know about the rest of you, but generally in non-pandemic times in these weeks of Advent leading up to Christmas, I tend to find myself simultaneously filled by the joy and anticipation of the season...and also rushing from one activity to another, barely able to stay on top of what's coming next. I would guess that I'm not alone in this experience and that many of you too can relate exactly to what I'm saying.

Now, I share all this not to complain – because this is without a doubt my favorite time of the year – but I share this simply to acknowledge the beauty, joy, *and* complexity of the season. There has been one thing though that has helped me navigate these Advent days leading toward Christmas as well as these first few months transitioning into my new role as pastor – and it's a mantra of sorts that I've found myself repeating quite often lately, *"You don't have to do everything in your first year!"* And of course, that's true. I'm just in the beginning stages of my new pastoral ministry, and while there's so much that I'm excited to dive into and accomplish, it doesn't – and can't! – all happen at once.

And then it hit me while reading the Scripture texts for this week that this is also true of Christmas. We don't have to prepare for all of it in Advent. We don't have to celebrate everything on December 25<sup>th</sup>, or even during the "twelve days of Christmas" that take us from Christmas to Epiphany. Because quite honestly, we could all use the reminder that the meaning and significance of Advent and Christmas don't end on December 25, rather they are just beginning.

See, I think beginnings are important because they tend to set the tone for what's to come – in essence, they clue us in on what to expect going forward. And the gospel text for this Second Sunday of Advent gives that to us in the beginning of Mark's Gospel which is truly unlike any of the others.

Beginnings also make us consider endings and I don't think we can consider the beginning of Mark without thinking about its ending, *"and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid..."*. And yet, the real ending of Mark is not really the ending at all. *"Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."* *"He is not here"* is perhaps the best "good news" of all. That nothing, not a tomb, or even death can stop God from fulfilling God's promises.

And if we look back to Mark's first words out of the gate, *"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,"* then we will see that Mark doesn't waste any time getting right to the point to tell what God is up to in Jesus and what God has been about all along – *good news*. To the Israelites wandering in exile this was especially "good news." And I have no doubt that we too could say the same given our current circumstances.

In the midst of devastation and despair, of hopelessness and uncertainty, the exiles hear the good news: God is here, God is victorious, your God reigns. So just maybe in the midst of *our* difficult, challenging and uncertain times this too is exactly what *we* need to hear most – God is here, God is victorious, our God reigns.

In fact, the whole beginning of Mark is the fulfillment of one promise after another. The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ reaches back to the promises of God and helps us imagine God's promise filled realities – both now and in our future life with God.

The opening of Mark's Gospel also reminds us of the decentering nature of God's good news which is found on the edge – of everything. It goes beyond the boundaries of where we think God can be or is supposed to be. The good news of God brings hope to all those who find themselves in the peripheries of our world. God's good news of grace announces God's presence on the fringe, in the margins, and on the sidelines. The good news of God's love that goes beyond, and God's promise that there is no place God will not go or be – *for us*.

And I think there's something else that Mark is trying to tell us both by the simplicity and the open-ended quality of his gospel opening, well and the ending for that matter. I think Mark is suggesting that his whole story about Jesus, beginning with John the Baptist and running through the calling of his disciples, casting out demons, healing the sick, feeding the hungry and culminating in his death and the announcement of his resurrection is all ***just the beginning***.

The beauty of the story of the good news of Jesus Christ is that it continues...to this day...among us! And despite the depressing daily headlines that bombard us, the upheaval, the unrest and the general anxiety of these days – these words nevertheless come to us as timely and important words of hope and reassurance.

All this leads me to wonder if it would be helpful for us to consider taking time to pause amidst the frenzied, joyful, *and* difficult preparations of the season to be reminded that God is still with us, working through us, continuing the story of the good news among and in and with us...and that God will keep at it well after the Advent and Christmas seasons have come and gone.

God is not done. We are not yet what we have been called to be. The promises of Advent and Christmas are bigger than we can ever imagine. And God's mercy and blessing extend farther and deeper than we will ever comprehend. Perhaps the very essence of Advent and Christmas is that in the stable at Bethlehem God was not only keeping the promises God made to Israel but was also making and keeping promises to us. That in Jesus, Emmanuel – God with us, God sees us at our lowest points and hears our cries of fear and concern and doubt – and responds in love by coming down to take on our form and join God's own self to our earthly lives.

I'm sure that the list of low points for each one of us has grown exponentially this past year – the global coronavirus pandemic, the death of loved ones, the loss of a job or a dream, an addiction or mental or physical or emotional illness that continues to resurface, a contentious election, or the racial injustice that continues to infect our world. To all these cries for deliverance, God responds with promises of healing, of hope, of peace, and of justice in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Dear friends, this is just the beginning and it is my deep hope that you would be blessed with hope and peace as you claim God's promises for your life and then go out and proclaim and live this life-changing promise, now and throughout the Advent and Christmas seasons and into a new year of God's grace. Thanks be to God.

Amen!