

The Second Sunday in Advent
December 9-10, 2017
Mark 1:1-8

“Where the Wild Things Are”

Way back more than fifty years ago in 1963, a very creative author and illustrator named Maurice Sendak published his children’s book, *Where the Wild Things Are*, now a classic. How many of us remember reading this as a child, or reading it to our own children or grandchildren? It tells the story of a little boy, Max, who gets into trouble when he wears his wolf suit and so he’s sent to bed without any dinner. In the mind of a little boy, his room is magically transformed into the outside world and he sails off in his private boat to where the wild things are. As the book puts it, “And when he came to the place where the wild things are they roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws til Max said ‘BE STILL!’” Max is then named “king of all wild things.” But there was a problem: “... Max the king of all wild things was lonely and wanted to be where someone loved him best of all. Then all around from far away across the world he smelled good things to eat so he gave up being king of where the wild things are... and sailed back over a year and in and out of weeks and through a day and into the night of his very own room where he found his supper waiting for him and it was still hot” (*Where the Wild Things Are*, by Maurice Sendak. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1963). In this season of short days and long nights, we may find ourselves dreaming and imagining of far away places, like the young boy, Max. If you have little children (or even big children) at home, you know all about where the wild things are because they’re right there under your own roof! Today’s Old Testament (Isaiah 40:1-11) and Gospel (Mark 1:1-8) lessons both speak of where the wild things are. The Lord’s messenger is called to be that **“the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight’”** (Isaiah 40:3, Mark 1:2-3). On this Second Sunday in Advent, we encounter the Lord’s messenger, John the Baptist, who is out where the wild things are and who calls all people to repentance. May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

Beginning with the Advent season which started last weekend, we enter into a new cycle of Scripture readings for the church year ahead. Along with many other churches, we follow the 3-year lectionary of Scripture readings appointed to be read in worship services. Year A follows Matthew’s Gospel, Year B follows Mark’s Gospel, and Year C follows Luke’s Gospel. John’s Gospel is interspersed in each of these three years. We are now in Year B, and so our focus in the year ahead will be from Mark’s account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The very opening verses of Mark’s Gospel are before us today: **“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”** (Mark 1:1). And immediately after this, we hear of the one sent by God to prepare the way of the Lord, and that is John the Baptist. Mark’s account of John the Baptist is far more tame than what we are told in Matthew (3:1-12) or Luke (3:1-17). Mark’s entire Gospel of just sixteen chapters is also briefer than either Matthew (28 chapters) or Luke (24 chapters). But the message of John is the same in all: **“After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit”** (Mark 1:8).

There had been no voice of prophecy in Israel for some 400 years, and then out of nowhere John bursts onto the scene. His fiery preaching out in the wilderness, together with his rough clothing of camel’s hair and his sparse diet, gave the strong impression that he was Elijah of old (John 1:19-28). His ministry of preparation at the Jordan River called all people to repentance for the forgiveness of sins. In a world where we rebel against a philosophy of “one size fits all,” of being lumped together with everyone else, John’s message really was all about “one size fits all!” The high and mighty, the lowly and despised, young and old, rich and poor, men and women – all were called to repentance. Can it be any different for us? The truth of God’s Word from Isaiah in today’s Old Testament lessons tells us that **“all flesh is grass,**

and all its beauty is like the flower of the field” (Isaiah 40:6). Our brief life will soon be over. And more than this, the apostle Peter tells us in today’s Epistle lesson that **“the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed”** (2 Peter 3:10). This is the harsh truth that we’d rather not think about. In the midst of this beautiful holiday season, we say, “Oh, that’s too depressing.” But the Lord calls us to think on these things now before the great and final day when he comes again. The Lord calls us to turn away from our sin and disobedience and turn to him with repentant hearts. In some form or fashion, we are all like that little boy, Max, in the story book. We put on our wolf costume and become someone we’re not. We, too, “roar our terrible roar and show our terrible claws.” We are prone to get into trouble and go where the wild things are. We want to serve ourselves. But once we do, we find out, like Max, that this doesn’t really satisfy like we thought it would. Something is missing; we are unfulfilled. Like Max, we want to be where someone loves us best of all. This is at the heart of our human existence.

The One to whom John the Baptist pointed is the One whose sandals neither John nor we are worthy to stoop down and untie. This is Jesus, whose first coming we celebrate at Christmas and whose coming again we wait and watch for, not with servile fear but with eager expectation and joy. This is Jesus, who does indeed love us best of all, and who demonstrated this not just with words but with action. His life of humble and loving service, his innocent suffering and death on the cross, his resurrection from the dead – all of this Jesus did for you because he loves you best of all. My friends, this is the good news of Advent that makes all things new. We don’t need to go sailing in our imaginary private boat to far-off places to find identity, security and meaning in life. All of these things come to us through the One who has come to us so that he might love us and give his life for us. In Jesus, we know who we are and we know whose we are. And because we know who we are and whose we are, we have a message of hope to bring to our troubled world. With all of the craziness going on in the world around us, people are looking for something to put their hope and trust in – something that is true, life-giving, and abiding for all time. Not just something, but Someone! You and I have the great privilege of doing today what John the Baptist did in his day, and that is to point people to Jesus. When all the glitter and excitement of this season is stripped away, what remains? At the heart of it all is Jesus, who has come that we may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10). We are the bridge between our Advent Lord Jesus Christ and people in the world around us. In a very real sense, we are the hands and feet and mouth of Jesus to bless the lives of others and be Christ to our neighbor. As Peter reminds us in today’s Epistle lesson (2 Peter 3:8-14): **“...what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness... Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.”**

May our Advent Lord Jesus Christ strengthen us in faith toward him and in fervent love toward one another as we wait and watch for his promised coming. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.