

God's Word for this Week

**Sunday 6th
December 2020**

Advent 2



*St. John the Baptist in the Wilderness
by Vik Muniz*

The Collect of the Day & Advent Collect

Father in heaven,
who sent your Son to redeem the world
and will send him again to be our judge:
Give us grace so to imitate him
in the humility and purity of his first coming
that when he comes again,
we may be ready to greet him with joyful love and firm faith;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God,
Give us grace to cast away the works of darkness
and to put on the armour of light
now in the time of this mortal life
in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility;
that on the last day
when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;
through him who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

The Old Testament Reading

Both the Old Testament and The Gospel Reading refer to each other today as we celebrate the voice and courage of John the Baptist as prophesied by the book of Isaiah approximately 700 years before John's birth.

Isaiah 40: 3-11

³ A voice cries out:

'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

⁵ Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

⁶ A voice says, 'Cry out!'

And I said, 'What shall I cry?'

All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for ever.

⁹ Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;*
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,*
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
'Here is your God!'

¹⁰ See, the Lord God comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.

¹¹ He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Reflect

The words of the book of Isaiah can be likened to poetry as they set about their craft in beautiful imagery. There is such a depth of strength and compulsion behind the words of this passage today, recognising the frailty of humankind and the enduring strength and presence of God.

The writer not only foretells the voice of John the Baptist who is to follow centuries later, but encourages us to find *our* voice and declare the presence and power of God within this world; placing ourselves at the highest pinnacle in order that we may be heard. Perhaps we may not be comfortable to take this literally, But surely our lives must mirror our understanding of this great higher power.

What are the areas in your own life that shine because of God?

What are the areas you need to work on with God in order to live more abundantly or increase your understanding?

The Epistle Reading

2 Peter 3: 8-15a

8 But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. ⁹The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you,^{*} not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.*

11 Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness,¹² waiting for and hastening^{*} the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? ¹³But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

14 Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; ¹⁵and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him,

Reflect

Our attention is drawn to the fact that there is far more to the ways of God than we can humanly perceive. Perhaps there is a deep sense of impatience among the early recipients of this letter who are desperately in need to see God's hand at work in a tangible way. Perhaps too, we are similar! The writer assures us that time is a very human concept and that God works in a far broader way; but to be sure to connect with the Divine here and now in this world, because we know not the day nor the hour when we shall meet him face to face.

Are you impatient about seemingly unanswered prayers? Talk to God honestly and with an open heart. Ask for him to show you the answer you require and be vigilant to perceive it when it comes. May God give you his peace and patience and his discernment in recognising his hand at work within your life.



The Gospel Reading

Mark 1: 1-8

- 1 The beginning of the good news* of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*
2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,*
‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,*
who will prepare your way;
3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight”’,

⁴John the baptizer appeared* in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And 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. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He 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. ⁸I have baptized you with* water; but he will baptize you with* the Holy Spirit.’

Reflect

There was such a hunger for change during the lifetime of John the Baptist. Power tends not to establish itself for very long through fear and oppression and somewhere along the way, people begin to speak out and seek change. 'All the people of Jerusalem' is a mighty group of people to be flocking to the rather unconventional-looking character as John is described to have been. Yet they are ready to leave behind them their sins – all that had oppressed them within and without of themselves; They are desperate for change.

Read again John's response to the people who come to him. He is willing to cleanse them and encourage them to 'change their hearts' but it is the Christ who can actively transform them through the Spirit.

Are you hungry for change in an area of your life?
The first step is to (metaphorically) come to John with an eager heart
to clear out the things that are holding you back
then God is far more able to step into the space that is left
and fill it with himself.

Psalm 85

- 1 Lord, you were gracious to your land;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
- 2 You forgave the offence of your people
and covered all their sins.
- 8 I will listen to what the Lord God will say,
for he shall speak peace to his people and to
the faithful,
that they turn not again to folly.
- 9 Truly, his salvation is near to those who fear
him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.
- 10 Mercy and truth are met together,
righteousness and peace have kissed each other;
- 11 Truth shall spring up from the earth
and righteousness look down from heaven.
- 12 The Lord will indeed give all that is good,
and our land will yield its increase.
- 13 Righteousness shall go before him
and direct his steps in the way.

