



The Second Sunday of Advent (A)
December 4, 2022
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†O Come, Divine Redeemer, and enkindle within our hearts a flame of everlasting love. Amen.

Let's entitle our time together in this message as "Competing Voices." What are those competing voices in your head these days? What are those silent tugs or perhaps even jabs during the conscious hours of your day? If you are not inundated with competing voices during these weeks before Christmas, I'd love to know your secret.

Black Friday, Cyber Monday and Giving Tuesday were not long ago. Some shops have had Christmas decorations available since early September long before even Halloween! Today, we're in the throes of the galloping crush to get to Christmas without much thought about life in the here and now about which I spoke last week.

Liturgically, the 'hear and now' is about Advent, a season of hope and anticipation, a season of retreat from the craziness of the swirl of shopping, gift buying and wrapping and planning for the 'big day.' What could that 'big day' look like for us if we have listened to the voice of God calling us to be people of peace, compassion, kindness, gentleness and love?

The competing voices in my head are certainly about Advent, the upcoming Advent Wednesday evenings and Advent Sunday Services and Sunday forums. While those voices are spinning in my head, there are voices chatting about three different Christmas Services to come and voices already chatting about the upcoming Season of Lent. Oh, and there is the Celebration of Life for our former beloved staff member, Wendell Chivis, an anticipated phone call about an elderly parishioner who I anointed for the last time yesterday afternoon and even upcoming baptisms in January.

What might the competing voices have been like for our brother, John the Baptist? John is believed to have been part of a desert community called the Essenes. The Essene community was a kind of monastic community set apart from the world of Jerusalem and the hubbub of activity in the markets and at the Temple. That community is believed to have been responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered not that many years ago in desert caves. Some scholars believe that Jesus, himself, spent time in the Essene community. John emerged as an ascetic presence, deeply rooted in the Hebrew Tradition and in anticipation of the Messiah to come.

https://www.heartscenter.org/TeachingsBlogs/AscendedMasters/MessagesfromJesus/JesusandtheEssenes/tabid/1206/Default.aspx?gclid=Cj0KCOiAvqGcBhCJARIsAFQ5ke4mAj28nj1-Y9IF7DjTocJbkXNjHszWTL0H5KANOc_yubVYiGpcWCAaAu9eEALw_wcB#.Xw3miihKjZs

Today's Gospel tells us about a man of deep humility as well as one who was a powerful voice of his own. John cried out in the wilderness to prepare for the One to come. Perhaps, he was clothed in a strange outfit and had provocative culinary tastes to demonstrate that he was no ordinary guy. John was one to be seen and heard. The Scriptures tell us that he had his own disciples and that many people sought him out to be baptized in the Jordan, including his cousin, Jesus.

These first two weeks of the Season of Advent are about preparations for the One to come. God's voice attempts to get through to us amidst the competing voices in our heads and so very many obligations of this or that. Here, we provide multiple resources to help us focus our attention and prayer and the important voice of God in Jesus.

The Scripture passages for these first two weeks in Advent challenge us to listen, to be attentive, to be reflective, to be aware: There will be a time when all things as we know them will change. We are called to the grace of Advent while tornadoes have ripped through the south, a massive volcano is erupting in Hawaii and gun shots continue to take people's lives here in Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Battle Creek and elsewhere.

Last week, I spoke of the 'end time' and quoted Scripture passages that speak to that time. Scriptures tell us that the Christ who came into the world will come again. What that will actually look and feel like, no one really knows.

What we do know is that John came to witness to the truth that the Messiah was to come and that he, John, was not worthy to carry or untie his sandals. Humility and an understanding of his role in life enabled John to hear the inner voice of God deep within him.

John was able to set aside the competing voices in his head to listen attentively for the voice of God. Recall, if you will, the voice of God at the Baptism of Jesus by John. Matthew 3:17 tells us that the voice of God was heard: "This is my beloved, the One in whom I am well pleased."

John must have been aware of who Jesus was in life. John's mother, Elizabeth, was the cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Luke 1:39-56 tells us that following the Annunciation, Mary went in haste to be with Elizabeth. She went to tell Elizabeth the good news that she would bear the Son of God. At that encounter, the baby in Elizabeth's womb 'leapt for joy,' and that leaping was John.

What happened in the years following that encounter and John's ministry to prepare the way for the Messiah is not fully known. What we do know is that John came to believe that Jesus was the One to come, and that he, John, would eventually give his life in witness to Jesus, the Messiah of God.

The Prophets of the Hebrew Tradition including John the Baptist must surely have been attentive to the voice of God deep within them. They had to have listened, to have been reflective and to have been open to that to which God was calling them.

Today, December 4, what is God calling us to in our spiritual lives? Are we here today in response to a call deep within us to be one with Jesus and one with one another? If the answer to that question is "yes," then, just what on earth might that mean?

What are the consequences of faith in Jesus in today's world, a world so much in need of the healing presence of God? Do we and those around us need the love of God Incarnate? Do we not need Jesus crying out to us and in our city streets, homes, apartments, hospitals, shelters or homeless encampments?

Beloved in Christ, the Season of Advent *is* the voice of God trying to get through the entanglements of our lives to be heard. It is the voice which calls us to life in abundance. It is the voice of Jesus calling us to listen and to be refreshed and renewed. It is a life-changing voice.

How can we listen? How can we hear? How can and will we respond? Amen.