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All Saints Episcopal Church

*The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*

In the name of God, who was, and is, and is to come. Amen.

Two 'things' today:

First: In the church world today, we take the idea of a gospel for granted. We have heard the 'good news' our whole lives. Even outside the church, scriptures are quoted and biblical principles are promoted so that it is impossible to escape some level of 'gospelization.' We even say, "That's the gospel truth," when we want to really emphasize the veracity of something.

So what would it be like to hear the good news for the very first time? What might the stories of Jesus bring forth in our hearts and minds if we had not heard them over and over since we were children?

In the opinion of most scholars, the first verse of chapter one, as it is numbered, that we just read from Mark, is really the title - and it is "The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" - of the very first gospel in written form. It was truly a 'new thing!'

Imagine yourself in a life of poverty, locked into the downward spiral of hard work and little gain, of being tied to one place for all of your life, under the rule of a foreign power, denied basic rights and freedoms, and lacking any real hope of change or advance. It would be easy to see such a way of life as pointless and distressed. But then, what if a message of possibility and hope were to come into this reality - the story of a redeemer and savior?

Mark's gospel is the story of an advocate, rising from the common folk, someone just like us, but in many important ways not like us at all - a man who holds the very power and wisdom of God!

Could the stories be true? Could the prophecies and promises of the ages come to pass? Was there really hope for the oppressed and the downtrodden? It's difficult in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to imagine what the Jewish people heard 2000 years ago when they heard the 'good news' for the first time.

This 'beginning' needs to be looked at alongside the second 'thing' I want to talk about: Advent.

We should notice that Advent is not chronological; it is not a biography. Advent does not focus its lens on a manger in Bethlehem. The readings jump backward through the prophets and forward into the time of John, when Jesus is an adult. To properly immerse ourselves into the season, then, we need to widen our field of vision, to look at Christmas not as a single moment in time but as a great arc of holiness, bending around the ages like an arm that embraces us, that defends us, that physically protects us and gives us refuge.

As the people of God, our tradition tells us that holy events are announced in a number of ways - by voices coming to us in the dark, or by angels announcing the birth of a long-awaited or unexpected child, or even by crazy, wild-eyed, sideways-walkin' guys with funny clothes and bugs hanging out of their teeth coming out of the wilderness. John is one of those wilderness guys, who cries out in the wilderness to proclaim *the one who is coming*. (Nancy Rockwell)

Jesus enters into the whole of our humanness, our sin. But when I say 'sin,' I am not talking about our so-called personal depravity, unworthiness, questionable morality, or anything like that. What I am saying is that Jesus enters into the powers that enable sin, the nations that support sin, and the structures that justify sin as a means to an end. He comes to take on the powers and nations and structures by telling the truth and being the truth -- the truth that names our own compliance, our own conformity, our own acceptance of the kind of sin that tolerates inequity, that believes we have "gotten past" the -isms that exclude and excuse -- the kind of sin that demands the protection of institutional principles in order to rationalize acts of dehumanization.

The beginning of the good news happens in the middle of nowhere and not in the center of power. The good news of truth and justice for all will be announced by those prophets who are willing to accept all. The truth will be known in the outskirts, in the unexpected places, the spaces where boundaries have been crossed and that needed to be torn down a long time ago.

It seems that the truth, if we are willing to listen, will not be shouted from the so-called halls of justice, but from a town of 21,000 in Missouri or from the streets of New York City.

In this second week of Advent, we are being called to repentance, not for our own individual sins, which we know are many and which are perhaps easier to admit because we can keep them to ourselves. Who would even have to know? It's just between Jesus and me. No, the harder truth this week is to admit our communal sin, our national sin, our global sin -- in the presence *of one another* -- that seems regularly to reject repentance in favor of blame and ignorance. (Karoline Lewis)

Can we hear this message as if for the very first time? Can we hear it as 'Good News' for all people? This may not be a very popular message. It may very well make a few people "a little angry." But the beginning of the good news needs prophets. The beginning of the good news demands truth-tellers willing to stand in the margins and speak to the center. The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ *promises*, for the sake of the world God loves, that God's love *will be told*, truth and all.

Come down, O love divine!