

Advent 2 B – December 4, 2011
Family of Christ Lutheran Church
Chanhassen, Minnesota
Pastor Kristie Hennig

Isaiah 40:1-11; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8 “Get Ready!”



Christmas is coming. Are you ready?

I know I'm not.

I'll get from here to there; I always do.

But even after many years of putting on Christmas for my family,

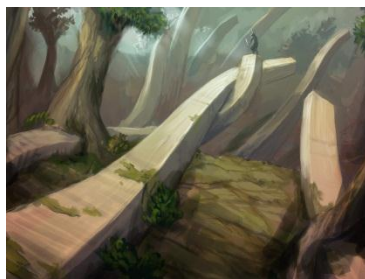
I am still daunted by my own to-do list.

With all my heart,

I believe in keeping things simple and streamlined
and focused on the Reason for the Season.

But every year I fuss and fret.

Am I doing it right? Will I get it done?



And then there's the to-do list at church.

Prophets urging us to “Prepare the way of the Lord” --

straighten out our twisted priorities,

kick the obstacles out of the way

to make room for the One who is coming down the road to meet us...

My fear is that *this* preparation is about a whole lot more than getting my elf-work done so I can settle into my favorite chair by the fire and enjoy the holidays.
John the Baptist calls it
a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”

While I think about what *that* means,
I’ll dive in and get started on that list of holiday to-do’s.

This afternoon, my Beloved Spouse will get the *tree*.
We’ll fuss at one another about how best to get it in the door,
but we’ll manage to get it in and standing upright.
I’ll play my favorite John Rutter and Sting CD’s
and string the lights...
unless they don’t light and somebody has to make a run to the hardware store for new ones.
It would be great to get the family *Christmas letter* written,
as Beloved Spouse will be sure to remind me...
but I don’t know if that’s gonna happen today.
There’s a Christians in Action meeting at 6:30
and something was said about a cookie exchange.
Tomorrow is for ordering tickets to a *Christmas show* of some kind,
and for *shopping*.
Getting packages *mailed* to Colorado and California and Indiana would
be great, too.
And I’d hoped to get the ornaments on the tree...

It isn’t hard for me to get absorbed by these activities.
They are important to me and to my family
and I’ve promised to do them.
They can even be fun.
But the prophets’ words clang in my ear...



Not until the valleys are lifted up



and the mountains are brought down will He come.
Not until the playing field is level for all people – with justice and access for all –
will the glory of the Lord will be revealed for all to see, Isaiah says.
And I wonder, how does my seasonal busyness help with *that*?

How about you?

Christmas is coming.

What are you doing to get ready for the Messiah?

I just mentioned my top five Christmas tasks for this second week in Advent:

tree, letter, tickets for a show, gift shopping, post office.

What are your top five?

Let's prepare the way for Jesus together.

This is the audience participation portion of this morning's sermon.

Take the clean sheet of paper and the 3 or 4 markers you picked up as you came into worship this morning.

We're going to create a word cloud.

Now fill up the page with other words that come to you as you sit here in church. They may be things you need to do or they may be words that express how you are feeling about what you are doing this month, or what you are hoping for in your Christmas family celebrations or in your workplace or here at church. Use letter size or color or both to show how relatively important or unimportant these things are to you compared to the others.

[*music*]

Now...turn away from your Christmas-task word cloud for a moment, and turn your sheet of paper over to the clean side.

Let's look at our scripture readings for today. They're in your worship folders. Circle 3-4 words or phrases in each of the three readings that stand out to you as important. (There aren't right and wrong answers here.) What jumps out at you... in the Isaiah reading? In the second reading? In the gospel?

[*answers shouted out*]

Now copy the circled words onto your paper, making a word cloud out of *them*.

[*music*]



Now add words and phrases that point to ways you can help level the playing field for others this season or in the coming year. How can you expand opportunities for those who are at a disadvantage? What are the acts of kindness, the works of justice that you could do that would make a real difference?

Dream a little more:

What could we do as a congregation – combining our gifts, talents, and wisdom to make the rough places a plain?

How does this little exercise work for you? Does it help you organize your thoughts and find your way through the holiday wilderness... or does it just remind you of the confusing mess that Christmas can be in our culture?

Part of our Advent waiting is making Christmas dreams come true -- for ourselves, our family, and even complete strangers.

Softly falling snow and twinkling lights and tiny tots with their eyes all a-glow.

But *John the Baptist* is here, too, looking odd and smelling worse, and – of all things! -- calling for repentance when we're busy trying to make everything beautiful and and everyone happy.

The prophet *Isaiah* speaks a word of hope to ex-pats wondering if they'll get home for Christmas.

Peter reminds us that in the time since Jesus walked the earth, our waiting is about Jesus' *Second Coming* – the new heavens and new earth he'll bring along with his judgement. Yikes!

There are a lot of voices crying in the wilderness at this time of year. And there's some debris on the road, too.



What are the obstacles on the road ahead of you?
What is getting in your way as you prepare to greet the Messiah?
Is it anxiety envy, or guilt?
Regret, fear, resentment, or unbelief?
A long list of things to do, places to go, people to see?
Tension in a relationship?

Let the Holy Spirit help you kick them out of the way
and make your rough places easier to walk on.

The One who intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words
feels our excitement *and* our anxiety in this holy season.
He knows we need help and healing.

Look at the sheet of paper you've been working on.
On one side is a reflection of your state of mind
at this busy and complicated time of year
in our homes and families and in the culture that surrounds us.
On the other side are God's words of comfort and challenge to God's
people on the move –
who have been washed and called,
who are walking the paths of the Lord to meet the Messiah...
The One who comes to lead us out of our exile,
our fragmented living,
into a place of warmth and light, of newness, wholeness, and peace.

This sheet of paper represents our Advent existence – our hopes and
dreams, our waiting and watching, the stuff we trip on AND – threaded
through it all -- the promises of our God.

“The grass withers, the flower fades;
But the word of our God will stand forever.” – Isaiah 40:8

If you're like me,
you'll use a list like the word cloud you made today to guide you in
making Christmas for the ones you love.
I encourage us all to turn that paper over from time to time
to help us remember Who is calling to us through the wilderness of our
busyness.

The great good news is that the royal highway for our God
is not a “Build It and He Will Come” project.
Our Advent waiting is not about achieving moral purity and ethical
living SO THAT God in Jesus will come.
God is already on the way...
and, paradoxically, already here at the same time.
Responding to the grace that has picked us up and embraced us,
we walk the desert highway out of exile, headed for home.
And we *will* get there –
home for the holidays.
Home with God,
where every day is better than the best Christmas ever.

Thanks be to God!
Amen.

“Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion and
both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer.”
E.M. Forster, *Howard's End*

