



ANCIENT HISTORY AND PROPHETIC GUIDANCE

Advent Two || 9:30 am St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, MA || Baruch 5:1-9; Canticle 16; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6 || The Rev'd Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.

Welcome to our Second Week of Advent – our midway point and the perfect time to check in and see how we are doing with our spiritual practice of actively waiting, or resting and setting time aside to breathe deeply and to center ourselves in the way that God needs us to, yet that the world around us seems determined to prevent.

If you've gotten caught up in the busyness and frantic search for gifts and perhaps have had unkind thoughts or utterances as you've circled parking lots for fleeting parking spaces – you have come to the right place this morning.

We are invited to take a step back, or aside or to give ourselves a time out from the hustle, shopping, and holiday bustle underway beyond our sanctuary to wait, expectantly for the coming miraculous birth. To turn toward the blessed event that is ahead of us, and to wait, faithfully, actively and in a way that is both engaging and restorative.

During our Wednesday Advent gatherings (7:30 am via Zoom for morning people and 7pm in person with dessert for those who like the evenings) we are learning and practicing Peace with All Your Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind. Thus far, we've focused on defining peace, which is not simply the absence of conflict, but is an active engagement to attend to wrongs with curiosity and commitment. This week's focus will be making peace with ourselves – you are all invited, and whether our Wednesday engagement works for you or not, you are welcome to add the daily reflections into your Advent spiritual practice.

This morning's guide to the Second Week of Advent is Luke - our gospel writer who likes to place the ministry of Jesus in context, always affirming his Divinity. In this morning's gospel he names a slew of famous local rulers and despots who were the polar opposite of

peacemakers– He names Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Philip Trachonitis (which sounds like a bronchial condition for which we might need antibiotics), Lysanias, Annas and Caiaphas are name checked before Luke then quotes a powerful passage from the prophet Isaiah who describes the expected arrival of someone who fits the description of John the Baptist's.

An important theme throughout Luke's writing is that Jesus is the one the world has been waiting for, and in naming all of these famous and powerful rulers and juxtaposing them with John the Baptist, Luke's intention is to differentiate John's power and John's message with that of those rulers who exerted power through fear, intimidation, and barbarism. John the Baptist's message and life's work was to have people repent to offer up their sins; to turn away from all forms of wickedness and to get their lives sorted out and then be baptized as the symbolic and public affirmation that their sins had been forgiven by God. By the time Luke was writing, all those other bold-named rulers were long dead, but people were still actively talking about John the Baptist and Jesus – whose ministries and legacies were very much alive.

Many people mistook John the Baptist for the long awaited prophet. Even our own namesake, St. Andrew was a follower of John the Baptist, sure that he was the long promised second coming. John the Baptist was such a commanding preacher that he was often surrounded by many people who thought him to be the Messiah. The scripture passages that survive about John include his consistent reassurance that he is not the prophet they've all been waiting for, rather one greater than himself - Jesus is the son of God and the embodiment of the messianic prophecies.

The attraction to John the Baptist must have been the relief that people experienced when they followed his admonitions and preaching – when they took his advice. The peace that they experienced as they repented and turned toward God must have been infectious. They surely had to look beyond the unusual prophetic messenger, who even in his own time was an odd duck with still famous and peculiar dietary choices (locusts and honey). John the Baptist's ministry of repentance and baptism resonated and empowered those who followed him.

And what of our St. Andrew? He followed John the Baptist as his Messiah, or certainly as his prophet of choice, perhaps experiencing that internal peace that passes all understanding, and yet, when John introduced Andrew to Jesus, Andrew was available for the divine truth. He turned from following John the Baptist, to being devoted to Jesus. This turning away from John and toward Jesus is not just life changing for Andrew, but in his re-orientation and acknowledgment of Jesus as God, as love-incarnate, Andrew changes world history.

Andrew gets it! And then tells his friends about Jesus. Scripture tells us that Andrew and at least one of his unnamed friends becomes a disciple of Jesus. He is often referred to as the first disciple Called. Because Jesus himself didn't go and seek him out, as he had with John and James and Peter. Instead, Andrew sought Jesus out via his friend John the Baptist.

I love the notion that our founding Saint, our patron St. Andrew set the expectation that, following his wonderful example, we would reach out to friends and invite them in. Andrew found the one true God in Jesus, and told his friends. His friends who were perhaps struggling to find their own prophetic voice, or were struggling in the wilderness with other gurus, or perhaps had no faith at all and were struggling to find meaning in the world. Andrew set them on the right path to Jesus.

So too, in these times when people are similarly struggling – to find meaning, to find a space in which they belong, are welcomed as good news, or are available for God's love and light, we have thousands of years to stand upon as we reach out and invite people in. I don't know what Andrew's most effective means of communication might have been, but I would guess it was face to face. We have so many more options in modern times. We can literally sit at a computer and invite people, or as we did so beautifully and warmly on Friday night during the Four Corners Winter Festival, we invited people with cookies, music, the promise of prayer and joy-filled connections.

We are halfway through Advent and are in the perfect place and the right time to reflect upon how we are doing with making space and finding opportunities for quiet reflection, and inviting others to experience what is offered here in this peaceful sanctuary.

In the few minutes that follow, you are invited to check in with yourself to see if you found time for quiet reflection, or for peace this week. With our High School Youth Group, we ask whether they have had any "God Sightings" or those moments when the Holy Spirit made a connection that surprised or comforted them. It is a marvelous practice – to take stock at the end of the day, or perhaps after this sermon, to ask "where has God shown up?" and where and when did I show up for a friend, or invite them to a moment of peace and connectedness.

This is our work of Advent. To prepare a place in our lives for the miracles ahead. To live expectantly and with intention. John's ministry and words echo to us from ancient times because they still apply – we are commanded to repent. To acknowledge our shortcomings and to offer them up, as a commitment to do better and make room for God and God's peace and love. That is the beauty of Advent and the gift of John the Baptist's prophetic guidance

and Andrew's brave example. May we too find the courage to turn toward God's love and light as we await the return of Jesus in the season to come. Amen+