

“Good News from the River Jordan”

4th Sunday of Advent – Love

Virtual Liturgy

December 20, 2020

Advent Theme:

“Still Connected as We Prepare Ye The Way of The Lord”

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2 Peter 3:8-16

Mark 1:1-8

Poem “John The Baptist” by Dr. Anthony Theodore

*“Other prophets
lived and preached
among the people.*

*But John went to the river.
John wanted people
to walk through
the desert and cross it
in scorching heat.*

*He wanted them
to be lost
in the wilderness
to speak to their
own innerst core
in the silence
of the desert.*

*Their hearts spoke
to them in silence.*

*They knew their sins
Before they reached Jordan.*

*Prophet John baptised them
in the baptism of the
forgiveness of sins.*

*Their inner being
were cleansed
in the waters of baptism.*

*Look deep into yourself.
Count the dark spots
in you and repent.”*

As we continue from last Sunday's theme of seeking answers to the "why" questions, today Mark begins by informing us about the “Good news” that begins at the river Jordan. John in a way is also reminding us of Emmanuel – “God with us!”

The river Jordan flows primarily North to South through the sea of Galilee and then to the Dead sea which is around 156 miles. Today the water is being diverted for drinking water, irrigation and sadly like some rivers here around the world, some areas of the Jordan River have become dumping grounds for sewage. This was a place that was a fertile source for the entire region. This was the

place where miracles happened, where history and herstory happen.

Mark begins by asking us a question “have you heard the good news? Iao Church, have you heard the “good news?” All the preparation that John the Baptist has been leading us to think about this Advent season – “good news of Jesus Christ, the son of God.” – and I would also add the son of a peasant girl, Mary, the co-creator with God. Every year during the season of Advent, we are called to prepare ourselves, to remind ourselves of a child that transformed not only the world, but our hearts. Every year we may or may not have something to prepare for, but everything we do is centered around the vulnerability of this child born in Bethlehem.

Especially this year beloved community. As I mentioned last Sunday, the people John was inspiring were the outsiders, the people who were desperately seeking hope, seeking some sort of relief from Roman rule, seeking some kind of “good news.” Today, in our time of solitude, in our time of mask wearing, social distancing, in our time of enormous grief – John reminds us that Christ is reborn in our hearts not just during this time every year but throughout the year. The journey to our Bethlehem of today for us began in March. When we could no longer meet together in the

Sanctuary, but worship from our House Churches. We had to learn new ways of living out our baptism. The good news amid this pandemic is that our lives have been and continue to be the transformation of our reborn lives. In the midst of great poverty, hopelessness, great loss, John still calls out to us from the shores of the Jordan River – Emmanuel – “God with us.”

You see beloved community, the people in John's time lived in poverty, many lived in isolation away from the urban areas. Many were shepherds – so any “good news” may have been few and far between. Even as we seem to live in isolation in our House Churches – Emmanuel – “God with us.” God's love and God's grace becomes more personal in and through our House Churches. At a time when it is difficult to see and find the “good” around us, let us remember and hear John's call – Emmanuel – “God with us.” Our time requires us to use the tools we have to remain strong as a community and as a church. We have more capabilities of calling, video chatting and that has become important now more than ever. Iao Church, people need to feel God's compassion in and through the actions of today's church that has the modern tools of communication.

So, let us close with this thought beloveds. We must be the John the Baptists for our time. We must be the voices in the wilderness from our own river Jordan of today that brings hope to people who are feeling hopeless. Let us shout out in many voices from the rooftops of our House Churches – Emmanuel – “God with us.”

Amen, Amene, Ashe, A-ho, and Alleluia.