



December 13, 2020
Third Sunday of Advent
The Rev. Anthony Estes, Associate Rector

Readings: Isaiah 61:1-4; 8-11, I Thessalonians 5:16-24; Psalm: 126; Gospel: John 1
6-8, 19-28

As I was thinking about the passages this week, it seems that I had a moment in which the Holy Spirit began to speak to me, to deal with me in my heart. And I was taken with the phrase that John the Baptist uses in the Gospel today: *“The voice crying out in the wilderness.”*

It’s almost as if the Holy Ghost began to allow me to hear a myriad of voices crying out to God, crying out for help, proclaiming that they were tired and alone and weary and cold.

And over the din of all of those cries, I heard another voice...speaking a word of hope, speaking a word of promise.

It’s really easy to identify with those first sets of voices, because, I think, they’re all echoes of my own voice. They’re all echoes of my own prayers...that in this time of Covid everything just feels weird...like you’re in the wilderness. You don’t really know which way is up. You don’t really know which way is down.

And perhaps it’s an invitation of the Holy Spirit to see the wilderness as a place of refuge and refreshment...and a place where you can confront the Holy and where you can be confronted by the Holy (and that’s something we have talked about this before when we talked about Moses)...and an opportunity to hear a joyous song break out.

John the Baptist, of course, is alluding to this passage from Isaiah 61 that we heard today, and it's a new song that for the spirit of heaviness you're going to put on the garment of praise; that the one who is coming...is coming.

It will be a day of vengeance but a year of favor. That in the place of our most intense prayers and desperations when the Anointed One enters the scene, it becomes a place of reversal...and those that have cried will sing.

And John the Baptist was that voice crying out in the wilderness. And I wonder if we don't need to hear that voice...that the One who is coming, the One for whom all creation waits, the One whom will bring judgment and vindication and restoration and peace, he is coming!

And it may not be today. And it may not be tomorrow. But when he comes, he will execute justice and righteousness, and we will exchange our ashes for beauty.

The Third Sunday of Advent is "stir up" Sunday or "rejoice" Sunday. Perhaps we all need a praise break...for just a moment to stop singing the song of sadness and weariness and sing a song of hope hope...not because we are in denial of what is but because we are in great anticipation of what is coming.

To sing a song in the wilderness does not deny where we are but to appreciate that where we are is not our final destination.

To use our voices in the wilderness is to declare to God, is to declare to ourselves, is to declare to tyranny and darkness and all the other forces of nature that run amuck in the wilderness that my joy is not predicated on where I am and what I have but is determined by the hope that I have in the salvation that will come and that will be revealed.

To use your voice in the wilderness is to get an attitude...and to say that whatever "this" is, it will not defeat me. Because as one hymn says, "*Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.*"

To use your voice in the wilderness is to speak well of God.

It is to answer the questions that the Pharisees ask John the Baptist: *Are you Elijah? Are you a prophet? What are you doing? Why are you doing this? How are you finding so much joy in the midst of such un-joyous things?*

To use our voices in the wilderness is to point away from ourselves and to point to hope.

There is a voice crying out in the wilderness and for a few months, a few days, for some a few years the voice crying out in the wilderness has been our own voice, singing our own sad songs.

But God is asking us, God is asking you to sing a new song...to change the tone of our voices...to imagine what voices of hope in the wilderness sound like.

Christ is coming and I'm not talking about the baby in the crèche (although we look forward to that day and are wrapping gifts and sending cards).

We are ultimately looking forward to the king who will bring peace to his realm and his name is Jesus. And although he is a ways off, he is also near us.

The Scriptures tell us that he is nigh, even in our mouths...that as we speak his name, as we utter his praise, As we declare our hope in him in him, he is that much closer.

So while we are talking about vaccines and talking about presents and talking about people that we miss, say the name, *Jesus*. Sing a song of praise and hope.

Don't stop praying for the Lord to help. And don't stop telling the Lord what's going on with you...but tell that story with just a modulated key of hope.

I need to hear that voice. The world needs to hear that voice. It is our song. It is the church's song.

Even at the grave, at the place of almost no hope, we still make our song: *Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia*