

ADVENT 2

How will we know . . . what now?

Summary statement

While we may sometimes feel discouraged or uncertain about when or how God will act, like those in our Scriptures, we are called to live and move in the world as God's people. Even as we wonder "How long?" we begin to ask "What shall we do while we wait?"

Isaiah 40:1-8

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:
'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'

A voice says, 'Cry out!'
And I said, 'What shall I cry?'
All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for ever.

Mark 1: 1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,

who will prepare your way;

the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

"Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight" ',

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

SERMON:

Nephew David W. - as a 2 year old - would toddle around saying 'doing?'

WHAT WILL YOU DO? What will you do while you wait? That's the question we hold this week, and heard in our VOC:

Rob: Be present.

Ruth: Clean. Taking control of her environment (managing uncertainty) - becoming more welcoming. Hospitality.

Ross: waiting on the light... inwardly and outwardly

How do we choose to live as we wait? Waiting is a function of time. Before, after. Being fully present is so challenging. We tend to look back or look ahead, rather than be right here. Sometimes it's important to look back and look ahead.

Who entered the building this morning through the parking lot door?
Did you notice anything different once inside the building?

Timeline - visioning team

Time - we're looking back so we can look ahead. LOTS OF QUESTIONS THIS ADVENT

Who are we?

Where have we come from? When did we arrive?

What are some of the markers that have shaped us?

While we at UMC don't focus much on the second coming, but put our attention on serving the risen Christ here, now, in our midst - all of the work we do as a church could, in some places, be seen as work we do as we wait for the return of Christ.

And this timeline is one way of showing how we're living out our faith, here in this world.

We use a linear piece of paper - the first date on that time line "informal gathering" in 1959, and then 'founding UMC' in 1963.

I'm guessing there could be a whole set of important events that shaped our beginning.

Beginnings are important. They set the tone for what is to come. They clue us in on what to expect.

The Gospel text for the second Sunday of Advent gives us the beginning of Mark's Gospel.

Consider the beginnings of each of the Gospels.

Matthew the historian: "An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

Luke sounding so official: "Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us..."

John, in his poetic way: "In the beginning..."

These are really different beginnings for very different theological reasons.

And how does Mark, the earliest of our gospels, begin?

"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,"

Beginnings also make us consider endings and one cannot consider the beginning of Mark without thinking of its ending.¹

So stay with me, as we take a moment to understand the beginning of this gospel by looking at the end-

Many believe the original text ended with women fleeing from the tomb in terror and amazement, and this final statement: "They said nothing to anyone for they were afraid..." (Mark 16:8)

That was the original ending to this gospel. They said nothing..for they were afraid.

This unsatisfying ending had the scribes and scholars scrambling for alternate closings.

Yet, the real ending of Mark is not really the ending at all.

For just before those women fled the tomb, they encountered a young man, dressed in a white robe who told them: "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; **he is not here...**" (Mark 16: 6)

"He is not here"

"He is not here," is perhaps the best "good news" of all. Not even a tomb can hold God, not even death....

¹ [Karoline Lewis: Working Preacher commentary](#)

In Mark's account, there will be no tidy conclusion or tying up loose ends for this story of God. There is a radical disorientation in the beginning and the ending of this Gospel. The end is the beginning and the beginning is the end of any certainties we might have held.

"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," are Mark's first words out of the gate.

Mark's gospel does not begin at the beginning - the linear beginning - does not create a timeline - with the "birth story" of Jesus or some sort of doctrinal claim that insists "this is what you need to know" about Jesus.

This gospel writer situates his story of Jesus in both the God of continuity and the God of newness. Behind the "good news" is the very Gospel of God.

Mark asks us to view God's good news in a different way.

This gospel asks us to see in new ways. Where beginnings and ends impact one another.

This lack of the linear got me thinking about MOBIUS (Moh-bee-us) STRIPS -

A Mobius strip has only one side and one edge.

Even something as simple as a piece of paper has two sides and four edges. The purpose of a Mobius strip is to connect the full surface of a strip into one continuous side. The side is twice as long as either of the original two sides.²

With a mobius strip you don't know where one side turns to the other. ***The edges run into one another.***

Hold that thought as we look at our scripture -

This good News that Mark comes to proclaim - the good news of Jesus, son of God - it's not where we might expect.

We find God's good news not in Jerusalem - the seat of power - but in the wilderness where the *whole* Judean countryside and *all* the people of Jerusalem were going out to meet John the Baptist.³

The opening of Mark's Gospel reminds us of the **decentering** of God's good news which is found on

²

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/mobius-strip-definition-explanation-uses.html#:~:text=Mobius%20strips%20connect%20both%20sides,tear%20of%20large%20conveyor%20belts>

³ [Karoline Lewis: Working Preacher commentary](#)

the edge... the edge of everything.

This gospel beginning goes beyond the boundaries of where we thought God was supposed to be. We find ourselves not in the hustle and bustle of Jerusalem but outside of her city walls, in the margins, on the sidelines, the edge.

(hold Mobius strip)

Upside down good news - inside outside good news.

Like the Mobius strip - the edges blur. What's outside is now inside.

Everyone's heading out of the city, into wild spaces.

Do you ever feel like you're on the edge? Maybe like you don't quite belong?

More questions than answers?

The good news of God **brings** hope to those who find themselves on the edges of our world,

but - and this is an important but... but the good news of God also **belongs** there.

For the Good News is for everyone. The good news belongs to everyone.

That brings me back to the timeline we're working on....

As we look ahead, we look back. While we may use this flat piece of paper to document and show where we've been - this timeline - it's not really linear.

We, the visioning team, want to understand better
where we've been; who we've been;
what's going on in the middle - in our places of worship,
and around the edges - of our community and the world.

There are sticky notes - we want to know:

When did you start attending?

What are significant events in the life of UMC that you remember and think we should collectively?

In some ways this timeline celebrates our life together. Weddings and anniversaries - would someone include the 40th and 50th anniversary celebrations? We remember funerals of those who were a part of us, and - the starting and the ending of ministries like 3WC. What else? Put those stickies up there - with the year and the event - the visioning committee will write them in.

What I really want you to leave here remembering is that you belong. No matter where you find yourself on timelines. No matter if there are more questions than you can even hold.

Remember:

The beginning of our oldest gospel proclaims -

“The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

This good news of God’s grace - It announces God’s presence on the fringe, God’s love that goes beyond the boundaries of where we thought God was supposed to be, and God’s promise that there is no place on earth God will not go or be for us.

Hold your questions, your doubts, your waiting and your doing - hold them all as something sacred.

God meets us on the edge - joins us as edgewalkers. No matter where that might be.

RESOURCES

[Karoline Lewis: Working Preacher commentary](#)