

“Finding Peace”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill
Sunday December 6, 2020 Advent II

Mark 1:1-8

2 Peter 3:8-15a

I was thinking about entitling the message this morning: “A long wait”

That’s probably one of your favourite things... waiting.

We love to wait in line – at traffic lights, in grocery stores, in a doctor’s office or a lab, waiting to check your bags, and then waiting to get through security.

You have an appointment to get your car fixed... and you have to wait.

You want to buy a coffee, you get in line and wait, 6 feet apart.

You want to get something done at your home, the service person says to make sure there’s someone there at noon, but who knows how long you’ll really have to wait.

Waiting can feel like a waste of time.

A good appointment or good service is when they don’t keep us waiting.

But there is another kind of waiting – waiting in anticipation – waiting for your first child to be born – waiting for your holidays for the special trip you’ve planned – waiting to turn 16 to get your driver’s license - waiting for your wedding day, waiting for your anniversary, or a special birthday, waiting to board an airplane, or a cruise ship, waiting for university or a first job to begin.

There is a waiting that is packed with meaning, anticipation, hope, excitement, and preparations.

This season of Advent is also a season of waiting.

We remember that we wait for a Saviour who is coming again.

We wait in the company of prophets like Isaiah, and John the baptizer.

John readied his people to receive Jesus the first time-

“Prepare for God’s arrival!

Make the road smooth and straight!”

People thronged to him from Judea and Jerusalem and, as they confessed their sins, were baptized by John in the Jordan River into a changed life.

As John preached he said, “The real action comes next; the star of this drama, to whom I’m a mere stagehand, will change your life. I’m baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. His baptism – a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit-will change you from the inside out.”

This Advent season invites us to reflect on those two statements: “Jesus will change your life, and he will change you from the inside out.”

So how has Jesus changed your life?
Do you see a dramatic shift in every part of you?
Have you been changed from the inside out?

From 2 Peter 3 we read:

Since everything here today might well be gone tomorrow, do you see how essential it is to live a holy life? Daily expect the Day of God, eager for its arrival. The galaxies will burn up and the elements melt down that day—but we’ll hardly notice. We’ll be looking the other way, ready for the promised new heavens and the promised new earth, all landscaped with righteousness.

So, my dear friends, since this is what you have to look forward to, do your very best to be found living at your best, in purity and peace.

God’s word instructs us to ***do our very best to be found living at our best, in purity and peace.***

So how do we do that?
Where do we find purity and peace – wholeness- ***shalom?***

We know some of the answer... pray, read our Bibles, spend time with God, and engage in serving God through serving others.

But this season of Advent also invites us to consider spiritual disciplines of abstinence to make room for the work of God’s Spirit in making us new.

Disciplines of abstinence are helpful in that they help us bring our normal human desires into right order, when often they grow inordinately important in our lives.

Spiritual disciplines expose our compulsions and invite us to a deeper dependence and trust of God.

These disciplines of abstinence invite us to give up something – to abstain from something that is good- in order to make sure it remains good.

We're invited to disciples of solitude, silence, simplicity, fasting, and others.

I took part in a webinar entitled from Consumer to Missionaries.

The speaker's church took Black Friday and made it a day of fasting and prayer – some people fasted from using technology, others gave up food, no one shopped.

This pastor mentioned a familiar slogan “expect more, pay less.”

He described it as being a sort of mantra for our consumer culture.

We expect more and want to pay less.

So then I compared that with the life that Jesus lived.

Jesus expected nothing but a relationship, – his life was characterized by serving, and giving, not expecting and taking, and he paid the entire price- pouring out his life for us – holding nothing back.

We breath the air of a consumer culture – there's no escape – but we can live in counter cultural ways- by turning Black Friday into a day of prayer and fasting, or we can choose to celebrate more simply this Christmas, we can welcome the stranger and allow others to care for us.

We can learn dependence on God.

In a world filled with noise and instant messaging we can wait, and be silent, pray and watch, repent – turn in a new direction.

In years gone by there was fasting and feasting.

Fasting and eating simply made feasting special.

Many of us have lost that rhythm and our appetites are out of control.

Our waiting can be filled with hope, expectation, watching as God does change from the inside out.

Learning God's ways together... no longer expecting more and paying less, but serving more, taking less, joyfully paying whatever price, for we are waiting for our returning Lord.

So, when our Lord does return we will be found at our best.

Here at our Lord's table today we see again Jesus' example to us.