

“All Flesh Shall See”
Isaiah 40:1-11 Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 Mark 1:1-8
Year B, Second Sunday of Advent
December 10, 2023
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“The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.” That is how the earliest written Gospel starts, the Gospel according to Mark. Right away our hearing can perceive several things at once. First, this is the beginning, the start, the introduction. Even though this is a beginning, the story has been going on for a long time and our biblical memory hears the echoes of the Genesis story as “In the beginning,” God creates the heavens and the Earth, one day after another, much of the time declaring it good. The beginning Mark mentions is specific, it is about Jesus Christ.

This revelation points to another aspect mentioned in that first sentence. This beginning that involves Jesus, is good. “The beginning of the *good* news of Jesus Christ.” As the passage goes on to unpack what that goodness means the very best description comes from Isaiah, the very same passage we read this morning from Isaiah 40 where it declares a voice from the wilderness and a highway is made straight, the high points brought low, the valleys lifted up, “uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.” In other words, this good news is for all, and everyone and everything will have

equal, unimpeded connection as the “glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.” All creation is in on this.

So here we are, in the beginning with Mark’s gospel, a specific message that is good news for all creation, and it has to do with Jesus Christ. This leads to the last thing about that sentence written with so much packed in. The last thing is also the last word, which is also a name, but it isn’t. Christ. Christ is the last word in that sentence, which is also a name, but it isn’t. Jesus Christ. Christ is not Jesus’ last name. It would be better if it was translated, Jesus the Christ, or Christ Jesus.

Christ is a title rather than a name. Christ points us to the second person of the Trinity. Jesus is the historic person who embodies the fullness of the Living Christ. Cosmic Christ, through whom God creates all things. As mentioned, this story has been going on for a long time, so long that it’s gone on before time begins and it will continue after time concludes. Christ exists outside of time as we know it as duration, as clock time, as the relativity of Earth perspectives in existence.

But we already know that; Isaiah told us. Earth time reminds us that “all flesh is grass; their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” Like

this morning's interpretation of the Lord's Prayer that we'll share in a few moments during the prayers of the community, as it ends by declaring to God, "For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory to the end of the universe, of all the universes."

The name Christ is so cosmic, so all-encompassing, broad, expansive, powerful, and transcendent, that we cannot get our minds wrapped around this fullness. But we are relational and when someone comes into our lives that helps us by loving us more, even to the point of death, that may have a way to get our attention, to help us notice, and like Isaiah's vision, make accessible in our lives the peace, love, hope, and joy God's glory reveals, promises, and provides through enduring ways.

What helps us connect with that title, Christ, and the transcendent glory is the name in front of it, Jesus, and the immanence he gives through his life, ministry, death and resurrection. Jesus shows us what it is to be a full human being who lives by love that casts out fear. Jesus invites us to follow and learn, more likely, be reminded of what we've forgotten as those created in and through Christ.

As Richard Rohr puts it in many of his writings and talks, Christ is the archetype, Jesus is the blueprint. Each of us in our lives need that voice

crying out in the wilderness like John, or the burning bush like Moses, something that makes us pause, turn, and listen; to open ourselves to a larger reality, to humble us enough to notice our original blessedness and the gentle, loving care we can embody in our lives. We need to listen for that voice, but more than that, we need to be that voice. We need to live our prophetic calling and become the voice in the wilderness.

That sentence is short. The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ. In typical Mark fashion, it's only nine words, but the import of what these words carry is more than the sum of their parts. Beginning. Good news. Jesus. Christ. This is a biography of spiritual proportion, one that has been, is, and has yet to be fully lived out in life's dramas, ebbs and flows.

Early Christians were not called Christians because Christianity hadn't formed yet. What they were called were, "People of the Way." That Way involves heeding Christ's call through Jesus as we hear, 'come, follow me,' as we hear, 'follow me, and I will make you fish for people,' as we hear whatever words resonate with our lives enough to take seriously the invitation to set ourselves aside so that we become Christ-centered, to address our own hyper-trophied ego and say, "that's enough, take your proper place and proportion, but no more." Like Mark's first listeners who knew putting

Jesus at the center of their lives was counter-cultural; it is for us too, even in the church's own culture because there are so many shades of gray when it comes to interpreting who Jesus is, what image of God shapes the followers, and how this gets lived out in community in ways that cannot be defined by doctrine, dogma, or creed alone, only love.

On a podcast regarding the Bioneers Radio program, I heard an interesting conversation that has to do with buildings. The human-built environment, whether it's houses, businesses, sky-scrapers, or stadiums. "In the US, buildings are the number one energy-using sector. They account for 40 percent of primary energy consumption, 39 percent of CO2 emissions, and 13 percent of water consumption. (2 and a half minutes into the podcast,

<https://bioneers.org/designing-regenerative-future-love-jason-mclennan/>).

Jason McLennan was the featured speaker. He's one of the world's most influential visionaries in contemporary architecture and green building. But what directs him, what motivates him, what gives shape to his environmental designs based on planetary systems, can only be described as love. Love is the main source of influence, not only for him, but love "can shape how people address creating living buildings, with architecture and design that creates living communities. He is shifting the fateful civilizational

inflection point we face – from degradation to regeneration – from fear to love.”

Did you get that? Do you notice the resonance with Mark as John is a voice crying out in the wilderness to prepare a way, to make ready for the kingdom of God, to recognize the need for justice and reconciliation, that declares the world is on the brink of a great unveiling? This archetypal message echoes through the scriptures as we hear words that describe the shift, the “fateful civilizational inflection point we face – from degradation to regeneration – from fear to love.” We live at a critical time. The wilderness awaits our voice to cry out.

McLennan says in that podcast, “This is the work that we all have to do, and this is the work that we’re trying to do in our practice more and more, which is a tough thing for architects to admit that it’s not about the buildings, because we actually have to focus on love. Imagine going into design meetings with developers and say, let’s talk about love. But my belief is that only through the sustained awakening of the human heart are we going to have a future.”

That’s what Isaiah’s about, that’s what Mark’s about; the sustained awakening of the human heart, about proclaiming love. And love is active.

The podcast mentions that “In the design world, when you’re talking about regeneration, regeneration of a place, you have choices that you make in what you do and how you design, so there’s this point of action. And every design intervention, there’s a decision whether you’re going to participate in a feedback loop that is regenerative or degenerative. But more than that, bigger than that now is the idea that there is this need for love and reconciliation, and that same decision point, is the decision point between fear and love, and feedback loops that are either bringing us together as a people and as life on this planet or moving us apart.”

He says, “as you go from thinking about people and other species, you understand that it’s the same root issues, the same fear, the same lack of love allows us to justify our cruelty not only to each other but to all of life.”

He sums up his point by saying, “I think I know the secret to life. It’s to be in right relationship to all living things. And to be personally reconciled with our role of life on the planet. And so we need to let go of our old ways of thinking and become a new kind of human. Maybe homo Regenesis. And if you’re homo Regenesis, you do recognize that you’re just one part of an interconnected system of all life on the planet, and that we’re all beautiful

and we all have a role to play in healing and making sure that there's conditions for life to thrive, using love as the conditions for life to thrive.”

Welcome to an active Advent. One focused on right relationship. This is also called, “righteousness.” Like the Psalmist says in Psalm 85, “Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. The LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him and will make a path for his steps.”

As we follow Jesus, the Christ, on the Way, through the “fateful civilizational inflection point we face – from degradation to regeneration – from fear to love,” may we become the messengers, come alongside John the Baptizer in the global call to awareness for the human heart to open as God's glory is revealed, as relationship with each other and larger planetary systems are healed from trauma, as we are washed anew in the waters of baptism, drenched by Holy Spirit. May Advent waiting for peace and hope be active, as these archetypal stories of old help us give shape and voice to the lives we're called to live here, now, as the future draws us forward to unfold the new heaven and new Earth and humanity that is integrated and regenerative. In this journey of the heart, may God be glorified, now, even as in the fullness of forever. Amen.