

Sunday, December 11, 2022 – Third Sunday of Advent

First Reading: Isaiah 35:1-10

The prophet describes the return from the Babylonian captivity as a joyous procession to Zion. God's coming reign will bring a renewal of creation in which health and wholeness will be restored. There is no need for fear, for God is coming to save.

We who live in the desert should especially be able to appreciate these images. The Sonoran Desert is at its absolute best after abundant rain.

1-2 - The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing.

4 - Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come and save you."

What fear are you most struggling with right now? How does the hope of Advent help you?

6-7 - Waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.

8 - A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; it shall be for God's people.

Hillsong United – "I don't know how you make a way, but I know you will"

Stoneman Road

When has God made a way for you – even in a most unexpected way and/or even in a most hostile or dangerous situation?

10 - The ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

What have been some of the most joyous times of your life?

Psalm: Psalm 146:5-10

Which of these statements about God speak(s) most powerfully to you at this time in your life?

6 – The Lord made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them.

6 – The Lord keeps promises forever.

7 – The Lord gives justice to those who are oppressed, and food to those who hunger.

7 - The LORD sets the captive free.

8 - The LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

8 - The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down.

8 - The LORD loves the righteous.

9 - The LORD cares for the stranger; the LORD sustains the orphan and widow.

9 – The Lord frustrates the way of the wicked.

10 - The LORD shall reign forever, throughout all generations.

Second Reading: James 5:7-10

How are you doing at being patient?

In what area of your life are you finding it most difficult to be patient?

7 - Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord.

The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains.

Without irrigation the farmer is totally dependent upon the weather and must learn to trust God and be patient.

Both of my parents grew up on family dairy farms in central Minnesota.

Growing up I never appreciated the wide range of skills they and their family members needed to have, how hard they had to work, what risks they took, and what survivors they all were.

Their faith in God and their church were at the center of their lives.

My mother regarding January.

8 - You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

How does the coming of the Lord help you be patient and give you strength?

10 - As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Who also and especially provide(s) an example for you of enduring suffering and being patient?

Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11

John the Baptist expects the Messiah to bring God's judgment upon the earth. From a prison cell, he wonders whether Jesus is the one who will do this. Jesus' response indicates that God's reign is indeed being fulfilled already through healing and restoration.

Matthew 3: 1-2, 7-10 - John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. . . . You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

When have things not turned out, developed, or happened as you had been expecting and even counting on?

What did you do about it?

In that situation what helped you?

2-3 - When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

4-5 - Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

6 - "And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."