

upon a time” and “happily ever after” story. God continually comes to us.

Every moment of every day, whether we realize it or not, whether we sense it or not, whether we can see or hear or touch Him or not, God comes to us.

Jesus is coming to create a new beginning in human hearts and a kingdom of God in this world.” The Lord makes a way for His salvation. So John the Baptist says, “Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.” (Mark 1:3) John is calling out to us, saying “The Lord is coming.” Let’s get ready. The Lord is on His way. He’s coming in the fullness of His salvation.

During this season of Advent, we love to talk about hope and love and joy and peace. We tend to focus on exalted concepts that make us feel good. Yet John the Baptist invites us into the wilderness to consider a message of repentance. Hebrews 12:1-2 tells us to “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles,” and “to fix our eyes on Jesus.” We “turn from” everything that hinders and from the sin that entangles, and “turn toward” the Jesus who is coming to us. This is repentance. It is a message at the heart of what it means to receive the coming Christ, who has come, and is coming, and will come again.

Advent is the time for repentance, turning from our sin and turning toward Jesus. John invites us out into the wilderness to join him, to join Jesus, in the way of the cross. Jesus is coming. He came 2,000 years ago as a babe in a manger. He is constantly coming to us, in His love, in His grace, and in His mercy. He will come again to bring all things to fulfillment. Are we ready? He asks us to respond to a message of repentance and to pray about hindrances and sin. He invites us to follow him on Jesus’ way, the way of the cross; the way of giving our lives away. Jesus is coming. Are we ready?

December 10, 2017

A Way Made Ready

Mark 1:1-8

Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

During the 2016 presidential race, candidate Donald Trump tagged Senator Elizabeth Warren with the nickname Pocahontas, and few weeks ago he mentioned Pocahontas again at a White House ceremony to recognize Native American soldiers who fought in World War II. The reason Senator Warren is called Pocahontas is because she claimed that her family tree includes Native Americans. Warren said she grew up with family stories about both grandparents on her mother’s side having some Cherokee or Delaware blood. But many genealogists doubt the fact of her family origin. I personally don’t care about her family background, but I do care about the tragic story of the Native American Indians in the history of the United States.

Let me begin with a short history of the Trail of Tears.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SosZ2ZRJymU>) This is one of the sad stories in American history. Many Americans expressed an apology and asked forgiveness from the Native Americans for their ancestors’ wrong doing. During the 2012 General Conference of the UMC in Tampa, FL, the United Methodist Church officially asked God’s forgiveness for all manner of past violence and neglect of native people. However, this Native American’s story is not the end of the tragic history.

We hear the news of the tragic story about refugees today. Let us watch a video of the refugee children from Syria.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG8qrqCDOmU>)

Today’s text from Isaiah is good news and hope for the Israel people. His times were disastrous. His people were in exile and Jerusalem and its temple lay in ruins. Yet he never lost faith in his God. He never stopped singing his sacred songs of hope. He

trusted a God who never forgets his people. Even though they may be unfaithful, Yahweh's steadfast love endures forever. In exile, Isaiah proclaimed to them the message of hope. This hope was grounded in the faithfulness of God. Isaiah offered them the ultimate comfort of placing their full trust in Yahweh their God. *"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. The Lord will lead his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them on his chest, and gently lead those that are with young"* (Isaiah 40:1, 11).

Whenever we are sad or in despair or in depression, we need Isaiah's courage and vision. For the Gospel writers, the visionary hope of Isaiah was being fulfilled, at first through the word and witness of John, and then through the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus was the supreme person of hope.

Advent is a time for looking forward with hope. No suffering or sorrow is too heavy for the Divine Comforter to ease the weight from our shoulders. No threat can be so deadly that God cannot offer the promise of new birth. Now it is time for some music. I want you to be still and meditate on God's encircling, underpinning, and indwelling love. I ask you now to let go of your anxieties. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVdKwogsXyE>) As you hear the music, I ask you to renew your hope. While the music continues, listen to the words from Isaiah 40:1-11.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will 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 like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever." You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

Comfort, comfort my people.... This is the message of Advent, the message of John who cries out in the wilderness - get the road ready for the Lord. This is the message of Christmas, the message of the angels who announce - *"peace on earth to everyone who pleases God."* We Christians have a special message, the message of God's coming - not in wrath - to destroy the world, but in love - to save all those who will listen to him. In the season of Advent we are called to prepare the way for Christ's coming. We are reminded by both Isaiah and John the Baptist that WE are to be the heralds of God's coming into our midst. And we are the ones that need to shout the news from the mountain tops and cry out in the wilderness: *"Prepare the way of the Lord."*

During this Advent our job is to help our family and friends point the way to Christ's coming; and in so doing, deepen our own understanding of God's way in our own lives. The word, 'Advent' is derived from the Latin word, '*adventus*,' meaning "coming." Two thousand years ago, in a place called Bethlehem, lying in a manger, God came to us in the weakness of a baby. God entered our world, put on our shoes, and lived, breathed, and walked among us. He taught, loved, died on a cross, and rose again. God came to us. But His coming was not a one-time happening and it is not a "once