



SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

CYCLE B

Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11

2 Peter 3: 8-14

Mark 1: 1-8

GATHERING

(An open, empty gift box or gift bag and two unlit purple candles are placed on a table in the gathering place.)

In this second week of Advent, we are comforted and challenged by the prophetic words of Isaiah and John the Baptist. As we began the Advent season last week, we were made aware of the urgency of the present moment as the time to act, believe, step out. How did you value time by the way you used it this past week? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The candles are lit. The leader calls the community's attention to the empty gift box and invites them to reflect quietly for a few minutes on what gift they think the world most needs. Members share briefly.)

Leader: Lord, we come seeking the gifts that only you can give. Let us see your kindness and grant us your salvation.

(The leader invites the community to pause again, for a minute or two, to

consider what gift they ask of God for themselves in this approaching Christmas season. After a time of quiet, members are invited to share their thoughts briefly. When the sharing is complete, members pray as follows.)

Leader: Lord, we come seeking the gifts that only you can give. Let us see your kindness and grant us your salvation.

All: Amen.

(A selection of instrumental music is played.)

Focus Question

In this Advent season, what helps you slow down and keep things in perspective?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel reading, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly struck them this week. Members then read over the commentary and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering into conversation.)

Commentary

The formidable statue of John the Baptist stands with his back to the Caribbean Sea and wags a pointed finger toward Puerto Rico's capitol building. His face is fierce, seeming to challenge the legislators to act justly. John is a prophet and like all prophets he has a vision and a deep interior knowing of God's dream for humanity. His vehemence is rooted in the conviction of God's love and his own conversion. Similarly, Isaiah speaks of God's promise and the hard work of transformation that accompanies its realization.

Being a prophet is a risky business. It means being so convinced of the truth that must be proclaimed that one is willing to go against the tide of popular opinion, to stick one's neck out, even appear foolish. Certainly, the crowds who approached John the Baptist had mixed emotions about this man dressed in camel's hair. His words and Isaiah's held a promise, but also challenged the status quo. "Prepare

the way of the Lord.” There is work to be done and changes to be made so that all people together shall see the glory of God.

We, too, are intended to be agents of change who challenge the way things are normally done and we, ourselves, are always being transformed by God-with-us. In this Advent season we are flooded with advertisements for the perfect gift for that special someone and the shelves are stocked high with merchandise. The eating, card sending, shopping, wrapping, visiting frenzy leaves most of us tired and often dissatisfied, knowing this abundance of spending and activity somehow misses the point of God’s gift to us in Jesus. What then does it mean to have a prophetic spirit in these weeks before Christmas? How do we counter the spirit of consumerism?

Each year most of us vow that next Christmas will be different. The prophets challenge us to focus on what is needed to prepare the way of the Lord, in other words, to work at co-creating the world, beginning with ourselves, so that we and it reflect the goodness of God that we see in Jesus. When we choose less rather than more, when we spend quiet time playing with a child or reflecting before the crèche or the Christmas tree, when we pause long enough to really hear the words of a favorite carol, or when we share cookies with someone who can no longer bake, we say *no* to the culture around us and *yes* to God’s promise of “new heavens and a new earth.” Risk going against the tide that threatens the hope and joy of Isaiah’s prophecy. Be a prophet in your own time and place so others can know the real joy of Christ’s coming.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ How does the word, phrase or image that struck you from this week’s scriptures speak to your life or the life of the community, your family or your world these days?
- ◆ What is your desire for yourself in this Advent season?
- ◆ Is there someone in your life whom you consider to be a prophet – someone who challenges you to think *out of the box*, perhaps as God thinks? How does this person challenge you?
- ◆ What keeps you from wanting to act or think prophetically?
- ◆ What would going against the tide of usual Christmas preparations look like for you?

- ◆ Name some value about which you are feeling invited to speak out.

RESPONSE IN ACTION

(The leader poses the question, “What does God ask of you/us in light of our sharing of life and faith this week?” After a few minutes of reflection, the leader invites conversation in response to the question.)

- ◆ Identify and implement one way you can simplify your Christmas preparations.
- ◆ Get off the seasonal *merry-go-round* for some time each day this Advent. Reserve ten minutes, at a specific time, to stop, sit down and reflect.
- ◆ Give Christmas gifts that will benefit the poor. Heifer Project International is one such organization that will acknowledge gifts given in the name of family and friends. Learn about the gift giving possibilities by contacting the group at P.O. Box 8058 Little Rock, AK 72203, 1-800-422-0474, web site: www.heifer.org
- ◆ Write a letter of support to someone you believe is a courageous voice for justice. This may be someone you may know or someone you have heard or read about.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader calls the community to some time of silence. After a time of quiet, all join in singing, “O Come Emmanuel.” The song may be found on the Internet. Following the song, members offer prayers of praise, thanksgiving, and petition for the needs of the world, the nation, their families, friends and themselves. To each prayer, members respond, “Lord, let us see your kindness and grant us your salvation.”)

Leader: Come Lord! Do not smile and say you are already with us. Millions do not know you and to us who do, what is the difference? What is the point of your presence if our lives do not alter? Change our lives, shatter our complacency. Make your word flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood and our life’s purpose. Take away the quietness of a clear conscience. Press us uncomfortably. For only thus that other peace is made, your peace.