



**The Second Sunday of Advent**  
**December 6, 2020**  
**The Homily – The Rev'd Canon Steven Mackison**

If Jesus were to come tomorrow, would he find you at peace? I'm talking about the kind of peace that Peter speaks of in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter, a peace where we are found without spot or blemish.

Do you wonder what that means? without spot or blemish... It has such shame-filled undertones that I question why Peter said it. But then I guess, if you denied Jesus 3 times, shame might frame your experience and shape the way you talk about God.

I think part of what he means is that so much of our lives are preoccupied with fixating on the spots and blemishes, that we see in ourselves, and in each other.

Holding on to our own failings so that we can stop forgiveness in its tracks, when God's deepest desire is for us to just let go so that forgiveness can embrace us.

...Or nursing resentments so that we won't have to forgive others, when all God wants is for us to reach out to our neighbour with a contrite heart so that God can make us one again.

It makes me think that all of the lessons that we have grappled with during this pandemic are really Advent lessons that we are learning anew.

Lessons like how important relationships are: That's the foundation, after all, isn't it? It's why we light these candles each week, to say with light what we cannot express fully with words...

...that, more than anything, our lives depend on relationships grounded in hope, built upon peace, worked out in joy and consummated in love.

Haven't you come to realize that, yourself, in the wilderness of COVID-19?

...that relationships are the most important thing in your life?

...Your relationship with God

...Our relationship with each other.

And in this season of Advent we are called to discover that there is no relationship without forgiveness. For only forgiveness can lead you to peace.

But peace is not supposed to be the ten penny word we kick around when we say we need a break.

And peace isn't the absence of conflict, it is the presence of justice, of making things right between you and me, between us and God, and especially between us and the "other" the one whom we think is "not like us" because of our ignorance or arrogance or naiveté.

As John will try and teach us peace isn't a place you go to. Peace is the place where you are led. It's a long and winding road where you are led to discover how to reconcile the relationships in your life. I was talking about Lennon there, not the baptizer. I know its Advent, it's tough to keep all these John's straight.

And when John the baptizer invites us to the wilderness it is to say that peace isn't an escape to an oasis of forgetfulness. Peace is the place where truth spring up from the earth.

And what is the truth about peace that the readings allude to?

The truth is that your remorse or resentment, whatever is stopping you from being reconciled is a prison that you always have the power to leave, because God has already given you the key, and that key is forgiveness.

That is why in Mark's Gospel, the echo of Isaiah's voice comes first. He can't wait to tell you to prepare the way, to make the path straight. Because God is the way and forgiveness is the path.

Didn't you ever wonder why Mark's Gospel begins that way ...nothing about Jesus birth or early life. No, the first words come from the prophets leading you to the place where you discover forgiveness.

Because that's the beginning of the good news...forgiveness. That's why those throngs of people follow John into the desert, because they seek what we all seek, forgiveness, a way to reconciliation, a path that leads to peace,...to be freed from the spots and blemishes we see in one another and in ourselves.

It's such a hard lesson for us to learn and such a difficult truth to swallow because...the story has always been the same. We fall short of the glory of God.

It has been with us from the beginning. Adam and Eve didn't leave it in the garden, they brought it home to their kids. Like Cain, we have always been so preoccupied with whether we were good enough, that we failed to see that it wasn't about us – whatever we were offering to God or to each other – it is not about us, it is never really about us. All that is good and holy in our lives has to do with our relationship with the other: our brother and God, ...of how we see God through the other and how we see the other through God.

And so in our fallen-ness we take our own spots and blemishes and we project them on to our neighbour, and like Cain, we have the audacity to ask God in the next moment “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

If we were at peace, if we accepted the forgiveness that God offers to wipe away our spots and blemishes...then we would be transformed. We would never ask “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Because we would know that we are always our brother’s keeper.

Translate that message into racial justice right now. If we lived as though we were our brother’s keeper, maybe “black lives matter” would become more than words, but a way of life.

And if we were truly at peace, we wouldn’t covet our brother’s offering, like Cain and then have to kill him because we didn’t feel we measured up.

Maybe if we delighted in diversity rather than revelling in fear and envy, we wouldn’t be lamenting the Ecole Polytechnique tragedy today, even as we continue to struggle with violence against women and the LGBTQ2S community.

If we were at peace, then, like Cain, we wouldn’t have to wander aimlessly for the rest of our lives bearing the marks of our brokenness and regret.

There would be no spots and blemishes because...our deepest desire would be to love God and our brother, and through that love to come to know how to love ourselves. All it takes is forgiveness. God is the way, forgiveness is the path.

Fred Craddock once said: “The way to the manger must pass through the desert.” Each and every Advent John calls us to the wilderness...again and again...calls us to the peace that only comes through forgiveness.

And in Advent we seek forgiveness for ourselves and one another because we are being prepared to receive nothing less than God’s very self.

For into the fragile and frail clay jars of our humanity God is pouring himself in the person of his son. That’s why the way is being prepared, that is why you must be ready. Because the vessel into which God will pour himself is you.

And the only way not to crack under the pressure of receiving such an awesome gift is for the vessel of your life to be found without spot or blemish, to be at peace with yourself and with the world.

It is Advent - Jesus is the end, God is the way, forgiveness is the path, and, together, we take the next step. Amen.