

**Those Who Dream...
Sow Joy**

December 13, 2020

Rev. Tom Elson
Mission Pastor,
Temporary Supply

OPEN IN PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

God's presence is suggested everywhere. Reflect back over the past week. Where have you experienced joy breaking out, perhaps quietly or bursting forth?

SCRIPTURE READING

Together read Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11 and John 1:6–8, 19–28

Isaiah 61:1–4

61 The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.
⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins,

they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

Isaiah 61:8–11

⁸ For I the LORD love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
⁹ Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.
¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

John 1:6–8

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

John 1:19–28

¹⁹ This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰ He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” ²¹ And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” ²² Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³ He said,

“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’”

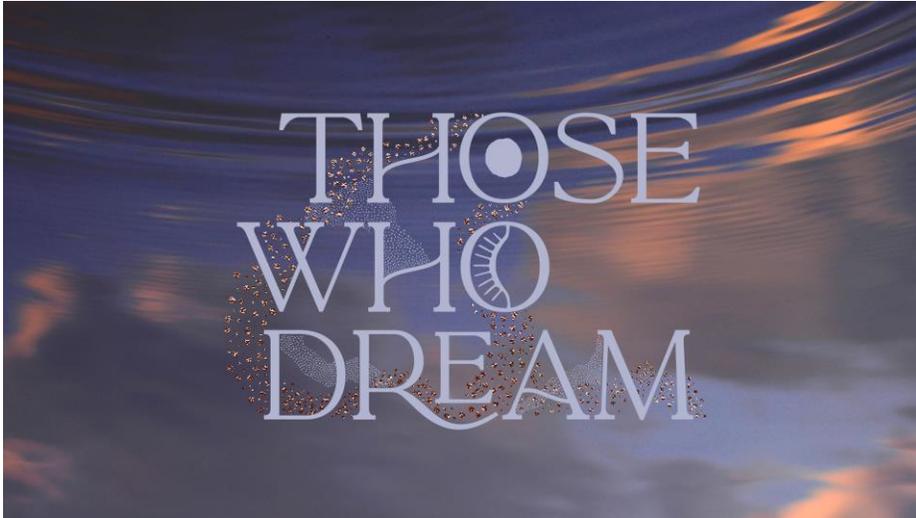
as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴ Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” ²⁶ John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷ the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” ²⁸ This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What would need to happen for you to be full of joy?
2. What has enabled you to say, with John, that you know who you are not and who you are? Has this self-knowledge enabled you to live a more complete and joyful life?
3. How does knowing who Jesus is and what he has done give you the experience of being filled with joy?
4. What do you think about the idea of your being sent as a witness, a voice to people in your world? Do you feel comfortable being a witness? What would make you comfortable?

CLOSE IN PRAYER



**Those Who Dream...
Prepare the Way**

December 6, 2020
Rev. Dr. Charlene Han
Powell
Senior Pastor

OPEN IN PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

What are some ways you prepare for the holidays? Why is that preparation important or meaningful to you?

SCRIPTURE READING

Together read the scripture passages.

Isaiah 40:1–11

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall 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 grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for ever.
Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
“Here is your God!”
See, the Lord God comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Mark 1:1–8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;

the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight”’,

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

QUESTIONS FOR

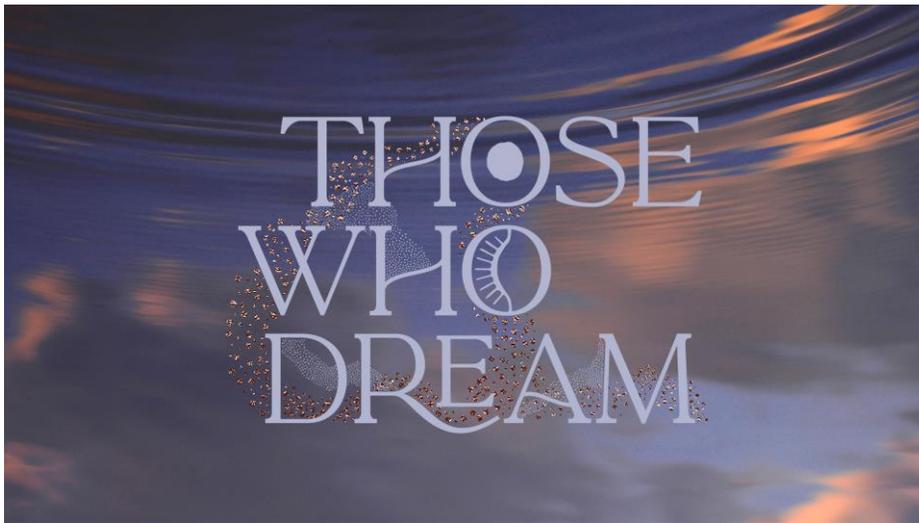
1. Wilderness is a very common theme throughout Scripture. How is wilderness referred to in the Isaiah and Mark passages? How do you see/understand/experience wilderness in your own life and in the world?
2. How is Mark's "Advent story" different than Matthew and Luke's? What do you like about it? What *don't* you like about it?

REFLECTION

3. What does "repentance" mean to you? Where do you see repentance practiced in this day and age? Why is it such a struggle?
4. What does John the Baptist add to the Advent narrative?

PRAY

Close in prayer together.



Those Who Dream ...Keep Awake

November 29, 2020

Rev. Mark Stryker
Associate Pastor for Caring

OPEN IN PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

We have entered the Advent season in the life of our church. To begin our journey, it is helpful to reacquaint ourselves with the season itself. Here are three prompts. Finish the sentences in your own words. When you are done, if you are in a community group share your responses with each other. If you are doing this as a personal study share them with a friend or a family member during the Advent season.

- Advent is a time to....
- Advent is a season for...
- Advent holds the possibility of...

SCRIPTURE READING

The First Week of Advent

This is the first week of Advent and the lectionary readings for this week are Isaiah 64:1–9 and Mark 13:24–37. Lectionary readings are scripture texts that are provided for every Sunday of the year. This practice has a long history that stretches back to the earliest centuries of the church. They are used for the purpose of exposing the Christian community to a broad range of passages in the Bible that are specifically chosen for the time of the church year, meaning there is something in the given texts that speaks to and broadens awareness to God's word. In many

cases the readings do not appear connected to the events of the church year; this week's texts are a good case in point. Read Isaiah 64:1-9 and Mark 13:24-37. After reading through the scripture a couple of times use these questions as a guide for your study. The texts are printed for you below.

Together Read (NRSV) Isaiah 64:1–9

(This reading is part of a larger section that probably begins at 63:19b; you might find it helpful to begin reading from there.)

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—
² as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!
³ When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
⁴ From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him.
⁵ You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your ways.
But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself we transgressed.
⁶ We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
⁷ There is no one who calls on your name,
or attempts to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.
⁸ Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
⁹ Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD,
and do not remember iniquity forever.
Now consider, we are all your people.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What is the problem the prophet has with God? What does the prophet want from God?
2. How is the spiritual and social condition of the post-exilic community described?
3. Why have things become so bad?
4. Given the poetic expressions, what words would you use to describe the state of the prophet's heart?

Together Read (NRSV) Mark 13:24–37

(You are encouraged to read the entire chapter 13 in Mark to better respond to the study questions.)

24 'But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

26Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. 27Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

28 'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 30Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. 31Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32 'But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. 34It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. 35Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, 36or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. 37And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What prompts Jesus to launch into his apocalyptic statements? (see 13:1)
2. What may have surprised the disciples in Jesus' 'apocalyptic' sermon? (see 13:3–31)
3. Jesus emphatically states to the disciples as they walk past the Temple to "keep awake"; what is he trying to communicate to his followers?

4. From your own experience what does it mean to “keep awake” as a follower of Jesus?

As you may have guessed, the historical interpretation of what Advent is does not simply focus on the coming of Jesus as the word made flesh in the incarnation. Advent is about God’s coming to us and that coming is what we dream about. Use the following questions to reflect on entering Advent this year:

1. What do these passages do to your understanding of Advent?
2. What do you dream about for this world, for our church, for our communities?
3. What do you think is God’s dream for all things and everything in between?

Take time to reflect on this past year, honoring the hardships and giving thanks for its gifts. In the space below record your dreams, big and small for the coming year:

PRAYER

Take some time to write a personal “dream of God” prayer for this advent using discoveries from this study, your reflections and the burdens that are on your heart.

Psalm 126

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.

²Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
“The LORD has done great things for them.”

³The LORD has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.

⁴Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the watercourses in the Negeb.

⁵May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.

⁶Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.