**Gospel:** 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;
3the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
 ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
 make his paths straight,’”

4John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5And 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. 6Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7He 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. 8I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

**Message**: Cry Out!

 Jerusalem 2600 years ago, Ukraine and Gaza today, and other places around the globe have experienced and continue to experience utter devastation to their lives. Economies collapsed along with buildings and especially family structure. Exile, displacement—where can one go? What was once “home” exists only as rubble. The writer of Second Isaiah attributes the Babylonian exile as punishment for sin. People do bad things; God gets angry and sends the invaders. There are those on both sides of any war, then and now, who have disregarded, denied and/or ignored God. There are also those faithful, those with rudimentary faith, or those with any amount of faith in between who suffer as a result of another’s ego, greed, hatred, perceived vengeance, and quest for power. More problems are caused rather than solved. In all the carnage, **God** cries out to the heavenly host, the ministering angels, “Comfort, O comfort my people!”

 One of the recent news broadcasts showed a Palestinian mother crying out and mourning as she bathed her 10-day old baby daughter in a small dish pan outside a tent. What future will that little girl have? The next shot was of the baby bundled in fresh blankets and sleeping—a small comfort *received from the Lord’s hand*—but what about her tomorrows? I wonder if that baby girl may someday be a voice crying out in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord through all the destruction. There will be judgment for the aggressors; there will also be judgment, an assessment so to speak, of the grace offered in what ever manner, no matter how meager, presented by any who see suffering and work to alleviate that suffering—perhaps one who offered the pan and water for that baby to be bathed. *Whatever you do for the least of these* . . .

 The Old Testament accounts cry out to sinful Israel, sinful Judah, who have gone their own human way, turning **their** backs on the God, who came to them in the wilderness, to turn back **to** God and be healed. Are there any who remained reverent to God, but suffer anyway? Consider the children who have lost their parents, parents who have lost their children. It can be very difficult to see the love of the almighty omnipotent God in the midst of such devastation. One teenage girl and her dog survived their captivity. Can God have the face of a dog? What about the others? How are they to be gathered, fed, carried and led like a shepherd. Cry out: WHERE IS THE SHEPHERD??

 Advent is a time of preparation. Those of us right here right now are hanging greens, decorating trees, sending cards, shopping, buying food, giving to charities, planning gatherings, anticipating a silent night and a joyous day. Some of us may even be anticipating the celebration (worship, if you will) of a birth that occurred over two thousand years ago. John the Baptizer stayed in the wilderness. People heard **his** cry to repent, to self-examine in preparation for the One who is to come among them. **Prepare**: wash your hands and face, clean up your heart too, and get ready for God is coming. People came **out** of the distractions of the city **into** the wilderness to hear John’s message, a message that exploded upon the people, even even the religious authorities, that they lack constancy, their faith is wishy-washy. We are grass that withers. We walk this earth for a short while, and during that time our devotion to God flowers for a while then fades. There is a resurgence and, again, a fading/withering. The Old Testament documents this human cycle of ebb and flow. It’s easy to proclaim faith when we are comfortable. It’s easy to fall away from faith and not be aware of or forget God’s presence when times are comfortable. We watched 9/11 as it happened. We watch bombs slam into villages. I have never been in the midst of that horror. I have seen what that experience does to a person, a veteran who has been in the midst of violence. I have seen those who attempt to numb those memories with drugs, vainly trying not to relive it. How does a person “fear not”? In times of personal or communal disaster, (people walking in darkness, people experiencing horrific suffering) there is either “fox-hole faith” or we question God’s power, or we question God and God’s existence. How does one in that kind of wilderness prepare the way of the Lord?

 I am in a wilderness struggling to write this message. I am struggling to make sense out of senseless destruction, injustice, discrimination, depression, disease, violence, hatred. I am in the wilderness struggling to prepare the way of the Lord, when all seems like God’s promises to become present have disintegrated. “What shall **I** cry?” I cry, “**Do not** sacrifice **hope**!” *Comfort* is a word only exiles can hear. True comfort—comfort of the heart—comes only from God, and therein lies the miracle. Cry out the presence of God in the midst of the storm. Cry out the good news of God’s Word, God’s promised coming. Cry out the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, love’s pure light, in whom all the fullness of God is pleased to dwell. Cry out how you experience God in those ordinary moments of daily life—when life is calm, when you smell the freshness of air, when a baby is born, when a small prayer is answered just the way you hoped, when you had the opportunity to do something kind to another person, when you smiled at someone, “peace be with you,” Maybe in that way, “all people will see it together.”

 “All people shall see it together” is a broad stroke of the brush. Perhaps people see the good news; perhaps people hear the good news. Our wilderness journeying is not over. The path we make in the wilderness may not be as smooth or straight as we would like to envision (mine looks like a corn maze); it may take a few/a lot of twists and turns, but we still in faith prepare the way of the Lord. We will and still find our self in the wilderness, but what makes that empty, forlorn desert a straight path is when we open our hearts to God allowing, **inviting** the King of Glory to come in every moment of every day, when we place concern for others before our own needs. THEN is the glory of the Lord revealed: in the warmth of your kindness, the generosity of your spirit, the joy in your good news, the love of your heart where words become action. The glory of the Lord is revealed in all desert wildernesses when people see Christ in you. O Come, O Come Emmanuel. The Lord be with you. Amen.

**Prayers of the People/the Lord’s Praye**r: O God, you are loving unto every person and your mercy is over all your works. Extend your mercies and compassion to all so that hearts may be healed, souls may be saved as we await that great day of Jesus Christ. Strengthen us and enable us to be your voice, your hands, your heart to end profaneness, intemperance, impiety, indifference of you. Bless us with your divine grace to show others the path that leads to the cross of sacrificial love. This day empower us to send loving words and actions into the world as we prepare for the coming of the Christ, continuing to pray as Jesus has taught, “Our Father . . .”

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**: Generous God, we are so thankful for your presence in our lives, for your gift of prosperity that we may share with others. Pour out your Holy Spirit on these gifts that they may become for many a saving grace, through Christ our Lord. Amen

**Benediction**: To God who loves us and has washed us from sin, has made us a voice crying out in the wilderness, be glory and honor forever. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, go in God’s peace to love and serve the Lord.

**Old Testament**: Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. 2Speak 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.

3A voice cries out: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4Every 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. 5Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” 6A voice says, “Cry out!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. 7The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. 8The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

9Get 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!” 10See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. 11He 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.

**New Testament**: 2 Peter 3:8-15

8But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. 10But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, 12waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? 13But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. 14Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; 15and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him,

**Advent Wreath Lighting**:

**Week 2**

Isaiah 40:3-5

**One**: “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

**The Other**: A way was prepared through the wilderness. Mary’s wilderness journey began as being pregnant and unwed. Mary and Joseph journeyed from Nazareth to Bethlehem, later on to Egypt and from there back to Nazareth. The 2nd candle is the faith candle. Through faith, God’s peace comes to us as we journey through our personal wilderness, as God proceeds to be revealed in the journey.

**We Light the 2nd candle, a candle** of **Faith**

**Let us pray: Unison prayer in the bulletin**