

A Sermon by The Reverend Deacon Cecily Sawyer Harmon, LCSW

St. Thomas's Episcopal Parish, Newark Delaware

Advent 3 Year A, December 11, 2016

Isaiah 35:1-10; Canticle 15; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

May the Words of my Mouth and the Meditations of my heart be acceptable to you Lord Christ My Rock and Redeemer.

Are We There Yet? No Not Yet

Are We There Yet? Just Be Still

Are We There Yet? Be Patient

We are in week three of Advent. Advent is a season of waiting, expectation and preparation for the coming of the Messiah. The season of Advent can be confusing. In it we anticipate both the coming of the Christ Child at the first Christmas and the second coming of Jesus at the end of the world. The readings for this season focus on the paradox between the sometime harsh reality of the earthly world and the hopeful dreams of the heavenly realm to come. These are

contradictions which are held in heavenly tension in our faith particularly during Advent.

In the reading from Isaiah this morning, we heard these words of hope and redemption.

“The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom.

**-----For Waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert; the
-----burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground;”**

-----Springs of water; what beautiful imagery!

When we think of the wilderness what do we think of? The wilderness during the time of Isaiah and the places where John the Baptist lived were places of danger and death, places to be feared and avoided. Wildernesses were places that were dry and bereft of people and what is needed to support life.

Today we use that word and concept in much broader terms. A wilderness for us in this contemporary moment is a place that many of us have been during our lifetime. Who among us have not have found ourselves in a physical, emotional, financial, social and or spiritual wilderness? A sudden illness, the

heartbreak of betrayal, the loss of a job, not hearing from God? For those of us who have experienced any one of these wildernesses we know how isolated, frightened, bewildered and alone we can feel and be.

If you have not had this experience yourself, all you need do is look at our communities, our cities, our country, just take a look at your friends, family members or if you are very fortunate what you will see, when you take the time to look assails your spirit and at times challenges your faith.

Right now, we are in uncharted times in our country after a very turbulent and unprecedented presidential election. We are attempting to heal and come together as God's beloved family. It is in fact our Christian responsibility to be the light, salt, faith and hope during this time in our circles of influence.

Advent is about dreams, the Isaiah and Matthew passages today called the people and us today to be messengers, to be prophets, to be dreamers of a better world.

The question that is timeless and universal is; how do we keep our faith, our hope and our dreams when we fall into a wilderness? How do we remain the lights of grace and healing that God's Holy Spirit empowers us to be?

Our baptismal covenant states that we are to respect the dignity of every human being. How then do we respond when we see or hear of unkind assaults on our fellow brothers and sisters? How does a Christian respond?

Very recently, since the election a former intern in my office at the university who is now the Associate Director of Diversity and Inclusion was verbally attacked while walking down College Ave. As a car drove by a young white male yelled out some racial obscenities. Needless to say she was shocked, hurt, and afraid to upset to get the license number to make a report.

As we look at our communities as we look at the world, take Aleppo, your heart breaks for the people living in this wilderness of destruction, and hopelessness and chaos all around them. We pray for God's children of Aleppo.

We live in a world that worships success, power, wealth, and beauty. We live in a world of high expectations. We live in a me world, a my way world. We live in a world where we are divided by class, nationality, gender, age, physical disabilities, ethnicity and race.

As Christians we know that many of these beliefs and thoughts are not consistent with Jesus's life and ministry; they do not promote love, justice and

compassion but rather lead us into a collective wilderness of greed deception and selfishness, a world of death.

As children of one God, the family gathered here this morning represents our Father's family. We are of different ages, sexual orientations, ethnicities, classes and races. We come to His table gathering together to share the body and blood of Christ that has knitted us together as one people. We, in the light of His love and grace become his hands to help, his feet to travel and his heart to love.

How do we continue to be faithful, hopeful and keep our dreams of a healthy loving world to leave our children and the generations to come in the midst of a secular world that is a wilderness of greed, lust, injustice and hate?

One does not have to be a genius or even think hard or long for all of us are doing it already. Some of us might be able to do a little more; prayer, study, worship, community and service.

As we live into this Advent season; and the proverbial question, are we there yet? Here are a few suggestions, call a parishioner whom you have not seen invite someone for lunch or dinner a cup of coffee, a glass of wine. Make that call you have been meaning to make. Respond to that request you received that

you cannot shake. Befriend the difficult neighbor, the relative with whom you have a strained relationship; what wilderness relationship has God called you to be water and light? What wilderness area do you think might benefit from your presence, the generosity of your family's time? Where has God called you to bring his peace, His love, His life giving water?

The holidays can be very lonely and depressing for some. Invite a friend to our Service of Lessons and Carol, my friend is very happy to come.

As faithful members to Christ call we are able to provide an environment to bring our brothers and sisters from out of the wilderness.

There will be fellowship with other pilgrims and dreamers. We will nourish our brother and sisters by the Sacrament, the liturgy and the preaching of the word.

Educational programs are in progress which helps us know Jesus more deeply so that we can more intentionally model our lives after His. Opportunities for service to the community (our adopt a family, Code Purple, Christmas Craft Fair, ECM's food pantry (Blue Hen Bounty) and several others are provided so that members can be the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

This is how Christ's people are fed and strengthened for the journey through the wilderness.

Advent is the time to renew our dreams and a mission which calls us to work to bring the love, justice and compassion of Christ to this community and to the world beyond as his followers we must be dreamers and we must be doers, that will bring the love, justice and compassion of Jesus to the wilderness of the world. Advent is the time that calls us to dream of the future coming of Christ, because we know tht he came to us once before. We shall be messengers and ministers of God's love, justice and compassion in all that we say and do.

Are we there yet? Let this be our Advent hope and dream.

Amen