

Advent 2C 2015

In the Wilderness

As I read the readings for this week's liturgy, there was a phrase in the gospel caught my attention: "the word of the Lord came to John, the son of Zechariah, *in the wilderness*." As I read those words over and over, I asked myself why the word of God made its appearance *in the wilderness*, far from the center of power and authority, far from the center of culture and entertainment, far from the center of theological inquiry and religious authority. The word of God did not make its appearance in the court of Tiberius Augustus or in the magnificent temple of Jerusalem, but in a howling wasteland, *in the wilderness*, to a little known figure, John the son of Zechariah, John the Baptist.

As I read that phrase again, I wondered what John was doing in the wilderness, by himself, far away from family and friends, far away from the comfort creatures of home. Why wasn't he in Jerusalem with its great temple and priesthood? Why did he go into the wilderness? Why did the word of God—the word of salvation—make its appearance there, *in the wilderness*? Certainly, I thought, God could do better. Certainly, I said, God should have acted in a different way, a more conventional way, and a more powerful way. But God did not; the word of God came to John *in the wilderness*.

And then it occurred to me—and perhaps it has already occurred to you—that the word of God comes to us in unexpected ways, at inconvenient times. The word of God comes to us in the wilderness of our lives, in those moments we are alone with God, far from every distraction so that we can only hear the word that God speaks.

As I read further, I understood that word that came to John *in the wilderness* was a word of salvation: God is about to do something new, and all flesh will see God's salvation. God is about to do something entirely new, and when it happens there will be a great reversal: those who were first because they are powerful will find that they are last, and those who were last will suddenly experience God's grace. The word of God appeared to John *in the wilderness* because those in high and lofty places would, could not, understand or receive it.

As I thought about this Advent Season, it occurred to me that God continues to speak this word of salvation to us, *in the wilderness* of our lives. God speaks to us in the wilderness of our heart and soul. God is always about to do a new work of salvation in our lives. And so St. Paul assures us in today's second reading that *God will bring to fulfillment the good work he has begun in us*. And the Prophet Baruch exhorts us to put on the splendor of glory that comes from God for God is about to do something new. God is always doing something new. But if we are to receive what God is doing, we must hear the word that God speaks to us, a word that we can only hear *in the wilderness*.

Don't let the business of this busy time of year distract you from what is important. Take the time to go into the wilderness of your own life, into the quiet and peace of God, so that the word of God can come into your heart to change and transform you anew.