

Text: Mark 1:1-8 NRSV

Message: **How does our anticipation reflects our faith?** Pastor Riva Tabelisma

Please join me in prayer.

Hide me in your glory, gracious and loving God. And may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, my redeemer, and my refuge. Amen.

As I reflect on today's passage, there are some perspectives that makes me connect it to the current situations that we are in. Not only for the Advent season but for the events that have been happening around us. Because the election period hopefully just finished, I was drawn to this thought - have there been any elected official - in whatever electoral position have acknowledged the accomplishments of the person that he/she followed. Especially if the person that preceded belonged to an opposing party? Or has there been a an outgoing politician who tried to create a positive narrative of the succeeding person especially if the person was coming from an opposing party? Why don't we let those questions simmer, then we will intersect that later on with today's passage. I would like to clarify that I am not endorsing any political parties here specifically. I was brought to that question because the election reminded me of how different and similar the election process is from the Philippines. As a short description - we (as in the Philippines) are in a multi-partisan political system in the Philippines, which means the winner is determined through popular vote. Chances are, the person who succeed a politician will be from an opposing party, unless the area is controlled by a prominent family, which we call political dynasty. You can just imagine how chaotic the situation is, and there is no such thing as formal transition. The elected official will only begun their work at the start of their term. Reading this passage drew me to that reflection.

In my Sunday School classes as a younger person, I learned that John the baptizer kind of preceded Jesus in preaching but also created the anticipation of his birth...plus they were cousins. Technically, the Advent Season tradition is not complete without recognizing the role John the baptizer. But more than that, I would like to share with you some new facets that I discovered. If we would like to see the historical context of the passage, historians argued that Jesus could have not been born in December because of the sheep-herding season. According to Wikipedia, it is impossible for the sheep to graze for food in the winter. But I am not here to contend the accuracy of history. I am here to reflect on the message of the advent and how the season calling me to do God's work. Another angle that I learned from the passage is the context of our passage. If we would like to dig deeper in the Scripture, verses 2-3 are actually a combination of 2 other prophecies (Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1) that were both taken from God's words from Exodus 23:20. In these three verses, there was a need for these messages. If you will notice, these verses, including our passage today, there was a need to build the anticipation of the people.

Let's try to look at these passages at a different lens...maybe move away from the Christmas message for a little bit. In Exodus 23:20, God sent the angel to be with the people in their journey to the promised land. It was a long journey...they have been travelling on foot. Can you imagine walking on foot with your young children who might be getting close to a meltdown because they were tired? Not to mention their flocks of animals, and all they owned. While there might be adrenaline rush from the excitement of fleeing from slavery, it could be wearing down at this point. Then, there's the Isaiah 40:3,

Israel was in exile and I can imagine how the people are feeling. They are experiencing overwhelming suffering. They all want to go back to their homeland so that they can start rebuilding their own lives. As a foreigner, I can imagine the longing and homesickness to be back in one's homeland, but I am fortunate to not be overwhelmed by suffering as the Jews did at the time. And so that is why there is a need for the prophet Isaiah to proclaim this message to the people, who might be feeling confused that if they are God's chosen people, why would God allow that they suffer. Further, Malachi 3:1 becomes an important message because the people have changed. They have forgotten their covenant with God. People have changed from being a loving community to a selfish one. In the metaphor of God being the parent and Israel being the child, Israel has started 'acting out' and is becoming stubborn. Thus, the reason to tell them of this message. There is now a need to tell the people that someone is coming to reprimand them of how they have become as people of God. And like in the 3 verses, unrest and chaos is the setting. Galilee is under the oppression of the Roman empire. Once again, the people are suffering, and there is a need for someone to save them – the Messiah. The ironic thing about this situation is that different groups have different perception of how a messiah should look like and how this messiah would come.

But for our passage today, it is also important that John the baptizers work is needed because the people are feeling hopelessness. This reminds me of where we are at the moment. I think, it is an understatement to say that 2020 has been a hard year. It has been one of the most devastating year for us, and I think I can say that it has been for many countries. The pandemic hit us really bad in March – but especially for this country, it is still being hit...moreso now. We were inundated by devastating news of black bodies being killed, which resulted to the uprising. Lives and livelihoods were lost and affected by natural calamities that are happening around us. Not to mention the political unrest that pummeled this country. It doesn't seem to end. The hungry are continued to be hungry especially now. People are losing their jobs because there is a great need to close businesses to save people's lives. When will all of these unrest end? When will the messiah come?

Our passage today invites us to build the anticipation in the coming of the messiah. But more than the imagery that is written in the Revelation, we are invited to be faithful as we anticipate the messiah. The advent season not only invites us in anticipation but also reminds us of Emmanuel – God with us. In my own reflection, I am reminded of how to be more focused on the present, and my anticipation brings me to the thought of heaven not as a distant future, or life after death sort of interpretation, but more of a time and place where love, peace, equity and justice abound – for all of God's creation, humans, animals, and other natural resources. And because of this, I am more focused on what ministries I can do now – this is where my anticipation is taking me.

Today is a special day because we are not only sharing God's table, but we are also welcoming another sibling in God's family – Iliana Rodriguez. And as we both experience/display the outward and visible signs of grace, let us remember these acts as things that we can do as we are anticipating our heaven. God's table and God's family is welcome for anyone who would like to partake and be part of it. No exceptions, no conditions. And hopefully, this Advent season will allow our anticipation to reflect our faith. May it be so. Amen.