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Have you noticed that when Advent starts, our lectionary readings start to get a little scary? Take today's second reading; the earth will be burnt up, the heavens set ablaze, this does not go well with my visions of sugar plums I should have dancing in my head this time of year. So what do we do when we are faced with that second reading? We stick with the first reading. We take comfort in the words of Isaiah who begins and ends with words of reassurance. "Comfort, O comfort, my people", "Here is your God", "He will feed his flock", "He will gather the lambs in his arms". Isaiah is telling a people in exile their suffering will soon be over.

God accepts this suffering as a sacrifice and he has not deserted them.

Each of the authors assures us of the return of our Redeemer. Isaiah uses words of comfort and compassion. Peter uses a more...uncomfortable tone. In Mark's Gospel this morning, John the Baptist only purpose is to point the way to Jesus. His location, the voice that cries out in the wilderness, suggests that this new reign, this new Redeemer who is coming, isn't walking down Main Street. He won't be found among the elite. This Messiah that John preaches about will come from the margins of society, the outside edge.

Christ comes to make us uncomfortable. We are searching for our Redeemer in this season. But where is this savior? The Jews believed their Messiah would be a great King that would lead them. Some Christians believe Jesus will return again when certain events take place. Maybe the events similar to those that are written about in the second reading. But think about it. Today we remember Pearl Harbor, the original terrorist attack, if you will. To those stationed at Pearl Harbor, wasn't the sky set ablaze?

Wasn't the earth on fire? I would dare say that many people that day were looking for their God for help. Man's inhumanity to man was on display that day. Where was God? It's an uncomfortable thought.

Every week we pray for our military personnel, and God knows we need to remember them in our prayers. But Christ asks us to remember the all named and unnamed people who lost in this endless war. We bring food to the food pantry, but when we were having our second or third helping of thanksgiving dinner last week, did we think of any of the families and remember them in our prayer? I'm embarrassed to say, I don't think I did. It's an uncomfortable thought.

When we turn on the news and watch our economy slink deeper into recession, it's easy to lay blame on whoever we see fit.

If we looked at this through the eyes of John the Baptist, we could see that this financial crisis wasn't all financial; it was partly spiritual. At least 3 of the 7 deadly sins came into play, as far as I can see- greed, envy and pride, which we all know comes before the fall. And falling we are. But a journalist named Adam Hamilton recently wrote, "God's sustaining power is not tied to the Dow Jones." We are God's people, not governed by housing prices or the stock market, but God's grace, generosity and goodness. We are asked by the gospel to seek out the wilderness in our lives, far beyond our comfort zones, and make a connection that will take time, energy and understanding to cultivate. Easy to say, uncomfortable to do.

The pain out there or even in here, is deeper than we care to admit.

Telling someone who is hurting from whatever social injustice that has stricken them to dry their tears and have a little faith is not an option. We, as Christian community, must reach outside that comfort zone and bring the reign of God to them. Our task is not to provide instant solutions.

Our task is to allow a time to grieve, to console, and most importantly, to counsel against anger or bitterness. Life's struggles are all too real for many of our brothers and sisters and God's promise of salvation like that in Isaiah today is even more real, tangible and long awaited for. They will look to us for comfort, because we are God's presence on earth. We all carry within us the spark of the Holy Spirit. We are an Easter people even though the calendar tells us it's Advent. Yes, they will look to us for comfort, just as we look to God for our own.

Christianity is a religion of anticipation. Now at Advent, we prepare ourselves. We pray in our Creed every week, "He will come again to judge the living and the dead." We all wait for a time of peace. But the Gospel of our Lord does not ask us to be passive in our waiting. The Gospel today opens with the words, "The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ". Did you know the Greek translation of Good News is Victory, as in a battle? How different would it be to start our Gospel reading today saying, "The beginning of the Victory of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Go Team! Wouldn't that inspire you to start actively working for a Messiah we already know is victorious?

It's not God's desire to be separated from any of us. To prevent that, God has prepared a way for us. Our straight path in our wilderness is Jesus Christ. This Advent let the Holy Spirit fill you and lead the way.

In other words, Jesus is coming; don't just look busy. Get busy.

Amen+