

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. This Advent, we are looking to hear words of comfort, of challenge, and of good news. I pray that all of you will receive God's peace and good news from today's message.

Do you know how many days are until Christmas? My daughter, Julia who is 10 years old, often asks this question to google.

Today we begin the season of advent, the word, Advent, comes from the Latin word meaning "coming".

I think the people who are the most excited about Christmas and waiting on it is children. Why? Because they know what is coming.

Friends, how about you? Do you know what is coming?

Today's scripture, Mark 1, along with Isaiah 40, teaches us what is coming. Mark is the shortest among the Gospel books and it is written earlier than the other Gospels, but the Gospel of Mark mentions directly what is coming in the beginning. He didn't mention the genealogy of Jesus, like in Matthew, nor did he mention the favorite people, like Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, the angel of Gabrielle, the wise men, the shepherds, (I love these people in the Christmas story), like in Luke, but Mark said the Son of God is the beginning of the good news.

Also, Mark talked about Jesus Christ, through the message about John the Baptist, who is a voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord, and make straight paths for Jesus.

I love to write Christmas stories for annual Christmas plays; the Christmas story is such a beautiful telling of how the angel Gabrielle delivered the good news to Joseph and Mary, of how the wise men and shepherds worshipped and praised baby Jesus, but I have not written or heard of John the Baptist in the Christmas story, even though I feel John is such an extraordinary person who challenge me. I honor and love him, but I have no confidence to live like him. Look at him what did he wear? He wore clothing made of camel's hair, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He was not a person who lived in the usual way, he acted like he lived in the jungle.

The life of John the Baptist reminds me of some of the Christians I came across during my college years. I was a commuter student. I rode on a bus that connected my college to the subway station. Most of the people on the bus, were also college students. So, when I got on this bus, there were some Christians who were always

evangelizing. They asked some questions of the people sitting next to them, like are you Christian? Do you know Jesus Christ and they had conversations with them.

I had been a Christian my whole life. I loved Jesus Christ and had served in a church already for years, but when I looked at them, I asked this question of myself, "Shouldn't I do that? I told God, I was not ready."

How did John live not for his pleasure, but only to prepare the way for the Lord and make straight paths for Jesus? I believe he knew what is exactly coming. He knew Jesus is so powerful compared with himself, he knew he was not worthy when Jesus was to come. He knew he was baptized with water, but Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit. He knew who Jesus Christ is. Jesus is King of kings, He is worthy. He is the messiah who is our savior. He is the anointed one who preaches good news to the poor, heals the heartbroken, announces freedom for the captives, and release from the darkness for the prisoners. He knew Jesus Christ is the messiah that the Israelites waited for.

When we read scripture, it helps to understand better if we look at scripture through three layers, the personal, the theological and the historical.

Personally, what does it mean that Jesus is the good news for you? For me, Jesus is the good news who saved me from my sin, Jesus is the only one who gives the way, the truth, and eternal life for me. He is my Lord, who loves me and cares for me.

What does it mean that Jesus is the good news theologically? Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God who fulfills scripture. He is the redeemer, who is the son of God, who was sent to us to pay off our sin. Jesus Christ, the firstborn of a new creation, who through his life, death and resurrection saves us and all creation from the power of sin and death.

What does it mean that Jesus is the good news historically?

We can see some scripture from the Old Testament in the New Testament, like in Today's scripture passage, in Mark 1, he referred to Isaiah 40. Isaiah the prophet foretold about John the Baptist, who is God's messenger ahead of Jesus, the one who will prepare the way for the Lord, and make straight paths for Jesus, because they knew Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise.

For the Israelites, Jesus is the future king of Israel who would deliver God's people from their sufferings. Jesus is the second king of David who is to bring

God's restoration of David's kingdom. When Jesus comes, they believe they will no longer live under Rome's law, nor under Rome's control. Jesus is the almighty king, who is like Moses, who led them out of Egypt, and the true king who made them come out of exile.

What does it mean that Jesus is the good news for your history?

In my history, it reminds me of my mom's prayer when I think that Jesus is the good news. It is not only my mom's prayer, but it also my home country's prayer.

My mom didn't experience the Korean War, but she grew up in a country where there was nothing after being a colony of Japan for 35 years and after the Korean War. They lived in poverty and were uneducated. I cannot imagine how my mom grew up in that kind of condition and raised five girls. Many Korean people cried out about their situation and asked for God's grace even though they didn't know who the heavenly father was. God heard their suffering and God answered their prayers. God's grace came to their lives through many missionaries who came to Korea, an Unknown Country to introduce them to Jesus Christ.

I'd like to introduce you to a prayer written by one of the Korean missionaries. His name is Horace Grant Underwood. He was born in London and immigrated to the United States at the age 12. After he finished seminary he was appointed as a missionary to Korea.

He arrived in Korea on Easter Sunday, 1885. After arriving, he opened a Christian orphanage in Seoul, founded and organized a Korean church, published the first Korean hymnal, and chaired the board of translators of the Scriptures into Korean until his death. He also founded the Bible Institute and founded a college, which is now one of the biggest universities in Seoul. Three of his grandsons and one-great-grandson also became missionaries to Korea.

He wrote this prayer when he came to Korea in 1885.

Underwood's Prayer (video)

It is not only his eyes that saw in Korea that nothing is visible, but also, many Koreans, including my mom, who see that nothing is visible. But she believed what is coming. She believed the day will come when they will rejoice with tears, realizing that they are one with our spirit in Christ and that we all have one kingdom and one Father in Heaven.

God answered my mom's prayer. My life was filled with God's Word, with learning His teachings and experiencing His presence. Also, my home country, Korea is now the second-largest missionary-sending country in the world. There have been so many people who served as a voice of one calling in the desert, in their land, and other nations because they knew what is coming. They knew Jesus is coming back.

And, God is still looking for the voices that prepare the way for the Lord, that make straight paths for him. I shared with you that I was afraid to live like John the Baptist. It is not easy to give up my pleasures and live for pleasing God. Also, how can I proclaim Jesus Christ with my voice that has an accent, as English is my second language? But I believe God calls me as a voice who shares, to deliver the good news to people. I believe God calls me as a voice who delivers God's hope. I know and believe what is coming, Jesus Christ, who came, died for us, and rose again, and he is coming back. Jesus Christ is not only my savior, but also a savior for all generations.

I believe that only Jesus is the hope for yesterday, today, and tomorrow.