

## **Advent – As John was sent, so are we December 8, 2019**

**Overarching theme:** Living a year in God’s presence through the practice of following Jesus.

**Instructions:** When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasis in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

**Core Point:** In this Advent season, we see how Jesus was sent from the Father to bring onto earth the start of the Kingdom of God. Jesus was sent, and in that example, Jesus sends his disciples out into the world to deliver the Kingdom of God by what is presented, said, and done.

### **Reflect on this Scripture:**

#### ***Isaiah 40:1-11 (NRSV)***

- <sup>1</sup> Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.
- <sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her  
that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid,  
that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.
- <sup>3</sup> A voice cries out:  
“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
- <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.
- <sup>5</sup> Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it  
together,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”
- <sup>6</sup> A voice says, “Cry out!” And I said, “What shall I cry?”  
All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field.
- <sup>7</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows  
upon it;  
surely the people are grass.
- <sup>8</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand  
forever.
- <sup>9</sup> Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings;  
lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,  
lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!”
- <sup>10</sup> See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him;  
his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.
- <sup>11</sup> He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms,  
and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

**Mark 1:1-8 (NRSV)**

- <sup>1</sup> The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
- <sup>2</sup> As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,  
 "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way;  
<sup>3</sup> the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'"
- <sup>4</sup> John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

**Questions to Ponder:**

- What jumps out at you from this passage?  
 What happened to Jerusalem, or God's people?  
 What sins did Jerusalem do to deserve a penalty?  
 After the penalty was paid, what was about to happen?  
 What are people like? What will not fade away? What will stand the test of time?  
 At the start of the narrative in Mark, what is happening?  
 What is the mission of John?  
 How are you like John?

**Commentary:**

The message of Isaiah is both a timely event for Jerusalem, but also a word of prophecy of the Messiah to come. Isaiah preached to Jerusalem starting around 742 BC and finished by 680 BC. He prophesied about the coming destruction of Jerusalem because of their sin. Assyria had made Jerusalem a vessel state, but in the next 150 years to come Babylon would take over Jerusalem. Babylon would cause the inhabitants of Jerusalem to leave their land and migrate to other places in the empire. Babylon would destroy Jerusalem and the culture. All this happened because of the sin of idolatry against God. Their destruction was the penalty that had to be paid for the breaking of the covenant they had made with God. Starting with Isaiah 40, Isaiah turns to hope in the future. At some point the penalty would be paid and the covenant between God and the people would be restored. Isaiah begins to prepare the people for the hope in the future when God's word will be fulfilled. Isaiah encourages Jerusalem to be watchful in the future for God's mighty work.

In Mark, the author is heralding back to the prophecy in Isaiah to show that John is the fulfillment of the prophecy. John comes out from the wilderness to proclaim the good news of the Messiah who is Christ Jesus. It is this one whom John is proclaiming that will initiate people into the Kingdom of God on earth.

The combination of imagery in both passages is unique. Both refer to the wilderness, and it is John that comes out of the wilderness to proclaim the message of the good news of Christ. It is indicative of all of us coming out of our own wilderness to accept the good news of Christ. We all are wild in our sin and desirous to fulfill our selfish needs. When we are confronted with the prevenient grace of God, we can be in touch with the love of God that changes our heart. The heart change begins by realizing that we are distant from God and need help on our life journey to value more than our own selves. By the confessing of our sin, receiving the forgiveness of Christ through his death on the cross, and living into his resurrection we live in right relationship with God through justifying grace. It is by giving over of our lives to follow Christ that we find the level ground of sanctifying grace that ties us all together on an eternal journey. This is like Jerusalem who were a people of God who followed their own selfish ways, but were restored by the grace of God into relationship with God. The ground is level for all people before God, and all are welcome to receive the grace of God.

So, what do we, as believers, do after accepting the grace of God into our hearts? Here is the other side of grace. Grace is given to us by God and is experienced by us to give to those around us. As in the text for today, John was sent to be a messenger of the Good News of Christ Jesus, so we are sent out to proclaim and live out the Good News of Christ Jesus. Basically, you receive so that you can give out. Got it, you receive so you can give.

**Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:**

In the United Methodist Church, what are the three forms of God's grace?

What is God's grace to you? How have you experienced God's grace?

In the past week, how do you recall you showed someone the grace that God showed you?

What can you do to be "sent out" to speak and demonstrate the Good News of Christ?

**Activity of for the life of a disciple:**

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Find a way to demonstrate the Good news of Christ. Hold yourself accountable in the group and give an example of what you did.