

**Sermon for Advent 2 (Year B) – December 10, 2017**  
**Preached at Saint Bede’s Episcopal Church, Forest Grove, Oregon**  
**Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8**

I’ve been to the windiest place earth! No, I’m not talking about Michigan Avenue in Chicago. I’m not even talking about the blustery Oregon coast. I’m talking about Mt. Washington in New Hampshire where on April 12, 1934, winds of 231 miles per hour were recorded. Here, in its own sub-Arctic climate, the winter is characterized by bitter cold, snow and ice – and, of course, the *wind!*

In the summer of 1995 my family and I visited the White Mountains of New Hampshire and drove to the top of Mt. Washington. As I stood in the midst of the weather station buildings, even in August, I found myself leaning forward into the wind in an attempt to move *very carefully* to the edge of the observation deck. Standing on the highest point in New England was an awesome sight, but it was also raw, abrasive, shocking and eye-opening. The windiest spot on earth—no doubt about it!

The season of Advent—the beginning of our liturgical cycle—is the windiest season of the church year, and in many ways it is the most raw and abrasive, the most shocking and eye-opening. During these four weeks we are hit with the full gale force of God, and we feel the power of God’s love. During these four weeks we rush headlong, with great anticipation, toward Christmas, toward the blinding light we call the Incarnation, toward that great day when we receive proof of God’s presence among us.

Even the person who best symbolizes the season of advent, John the Baptist, is a raw and jolting person, a blast of bracing air blowing through our contented and complacent lives. He wears strange clothes, he eats peculiar food, he dwells in a God-forsaken desert; and he speaks strong words that call his hearers to repentance, but words that also exhort his audience to anticipation and hopefulness. Throughout Advent we live on the raw edge of our emotions: there are sorrow and penitence for the sins of our past; but we also feel vibrant hope and joy for what lies ahead, as we sense the promises and presence of God.

This is a season of longing, a season of learning forward. Within each of us, within every human being, I believe there is a profound longing. We find ourselves longing for hope, for peace; we share a deep need for making meaning, for finding purpose in life. No matter what our circumstances or situations, irrespective of our personality type or psychological profile, we all long for “something.” We all want to find “something” which will convince us, once and for all, that life really has a direction and a goal. We are all searching for that ultimate reality which will welcome us in, that assurance that will finally convince us that we can relax; that we are “at home.”

This longing, throbbing need that we usually ignore is at its very apex during Advent. For this is the season in which we hear of the saving acts of God; we hear of what God *has* done as well as what God *will* do. And it is the scriptures that are intimately linked to Advent that echo in our hearts and resonate with our secret longing. And so, during this season of expectation,

we find ourselves leaning forward in the hope that here is the One in whom we will find our fulfillment. Advent is a time when God speaks directly to our longing and our emptiness, a time when we are pulled toward God's unquenchable, sustaining, satisfying love.

We no longer have to wait for the promises of God, because the season of Advent, like the Christian life of faith, begins and ends with promise: we receive *the promise of the Incarnation* when Jesus takes our flesh and shows us what it is like to experience God-with-us. We receive *the promise of the Second Coming* when our Lord will gather together all things and bring them to fulfillment. And along the way we receive God's *promise of Eternal Life*, as Jesus bestows the Holy Spirit on all his disciples—to bless, preserve and sanctify those whom he has redeemed. On such promises—on such a *hope*—our faith is founded. And Advent beckons us to learn forward, to reach out and to grasp the new life that God freely offers us.

Don't stand idly by waiting for something to happen! We anxiously await the fulfillment of God's promises because we know that we have a God whose "Word" we can trust. We who have stood outside the manger, we who have looked up at the cross, we who have peered into the empty tomb: we know that God is reaching out for us, even more vigorously than we are straining toward God. And in this season of Advent, we are called to be alert and attentive as we prepare for Christ's coming.

As the recipients of the promises of God, as members of the Body of Christ, we are invited to share in this season, to live our lives in an Advent time. In our baptism we too have made promises, and we are called to live them out in active and vibrant watchfulness. As we wait for the coming of Christ, we manifest our faith in God by living lives of repentance and generosity, by extending and expressing Christ's reconciling love in the world, and by turning our lives toward him each and every day. We prepare the way for his coming through hearts and souls and minds that are alive, and always open to the promises of God.

Advent points us forward, just as much as it directs us back to the birth of Jesus. But above all, we are called to live fully in the present, to act upon the promises of God. Advent invites us to learn forward *now* into the love of God; to strain forward *now* to meet the in-breaking reign of God. Walk with Jesus and embrace the Incarnation *now*. Trust that in the Second Coming God is bringing all things to fulfillment *now*. Dare to reach out for the new life Christ offers us *now*.

Can you feel the Advent wind in your life? John the Baptist's cry is clear: "Repent!" Prepare the way of the Lord in your own hearts *now*. "Repent!" Make straight the Lord's path in your own lives *now*. Lean forward into the full force of God's coming among us. "Watch!" Wait with baited breath and fierce, exultant joy *now*. "Watch!" For this season is the advent of our God—*now*.