
The Beginning of the Good News

A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Second Sunday of Advent – Year B

“The beginning” Mark says.

It is today’s gospel reading, from the Gospel of Mark, Chapter one, verse one: “The beginning, of the good news of Jesus Christ.”

This day, in the season of Advent, marks the day of our annual parish meeting. Once a year, the Cathedral of St. Philip, a duly incorporated entity of the State of Georgia, conducts its annual parish meeting. Besides electing new members of the Cathedral Chapter, we hear reports, and we review the past year.

Mark, too, as he writes his gospel, takes a bit of time to review. And, so, in Mark 1:3, he remembers the words of the old prophet Isaiah, “Prepare the way of the Lord.” There were many people, plenty of people, some notable and maybe some not so notable, who prepared the way for Jesus Christ.

In the same way, I give thanks for the people who have prepared the way for our annual parish meeting, who have been preparers of the way here at the Cathedral of St. Philip. We are a great parish, a holy parish, because so many people have prepared the way here. Thank you!

Thank you, to everyone who has served here this year. You have prepared the way for something!

The way that Mark describes it, John the Baptist showed up. What a character. Times were hard for John the Baptist, not always comfortable for John the Baptist, as he prepared the way. But he served. He served, knowing that someone else was coming. Thank you, to all of you who have served, through comfortable times and not so comfortable times.

Like the Gospel of Mark, we, here at the Cathedral of St. Philip, are beginning something today. Yes, the parish meeting reviews the year. Excellent! It is good to consider the past. But the parish meeting also begins something! The parish meeting is also the beginning of a new year.

As many of you know, the word “gospel” does not mean just a piece of literature, or some special doctrine. The word, “gospel” means “good news.” Mark is writing about the beginning of the good news. In the same way, this parish, today, marks the beginning of a new year of good news.

We are not just reviewing today, and remembering. We are beginning something. We are beginning another year of good news. Another year of gospel!

Here are the Cathedral Parish of St. Philip, we are at the beginning of something. We are beginning a tremendous year at the Cathedral. There will be new sermons and new music. New outreach opportunities. New groups. And new people. New people are joining our community. There will be new resources, new opportunities for gospel! New ways to serve. And new ways to pray. All these “news” are good! Lots of “news.” Good news!

And there will certainly be new life. Because that is what gospel is, that is what good news is. It is the celebration of new life. A new day at the Cathedral looks forward in hope.

The Cathedral Parish of St. Philip tells a different story from what we read in the media, about how church

communities are shrinking. Yes, they are in other places. We, however, are part of a different story. Things are growing here! People are coming here! Good sorts of news are happening here!

Our instruction for this future comes from our tradition, and from our biblical tradition, just as the Gospel of Mark noted. Mark remembered Isaiah, and we do, too.

At Isaiah, 40:1, we hear the words of God: "Comfort, comfort my people." Part of our story, part of our gospel, part of our good news, is that word, "comfort." We are a people who comfort. The world around us amplifies stress and anxiety. We amplify comfort. The world around us amplifies fear and paranoia. We amplify love and good news.

The season of Advent marks new beginning in the world; and, today, we are at the beginning of what God is doing new at the Cathedral. I am looking forward to Christmas at the Cathedral, the grand feast of the Incarnation. But I am looking forward to an incarnation that does not last only one day. This coming year will be a year of incarnation. The word will be made incarnate here throughout the year.

"Get you up to a high mountain!" said Isaiah (40:9)

*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!*

Lift up the good tidings! Lift up the good news! Do not fear!

Today, maybe the high mountain is this Cathedral Campus, this holy hill. This is to be a place, a holy mountain, that speaks comfort and hope. Not despair or fear. Comfort and hope. (in this season, "comfort and joy!")

We have good tidings to tell. We have good being incarnated here. Once again, we are beginning the good news of Jesus Christ.

Thank you!

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip