

Advent 2C
St James and Good Shepherd, Laconia, NH
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I would say that most of us live in a safe place, in a safe culture. Not that terrible things don't happen sometimes, but overall we have it pretty good. And yet I feel like fear is very pervasive in our lives.

We spend a lot of energy on 'What-ifs' – usually about things that are out of our control. I know that I am guilty of this. Then we spend too little energy on the things that we can control, especially when related to ourselves. We give precious little thought to what we would do IF...

For example, old or young, we are often guilty of thinking that we will live forever, and in perfect health. When my daughter and her husband recently traveled, I made a condition that before I would watch their children, if something were to happen to them, who did they want to care for their children. It forced them to have a conversation, and to make a decision about who was to raise their children if they died or were unable to care for them. Fortunately, nothing happened to them, but I felt better knowing that, if it did, I clearly knew what their wishes were.

We all need to have a plan. Whether it is who will raise our young children if we are unable to, or what kind of care we want at the end of life – everyone needs a plan. Hopefully, the plan will never need to be enacted, but there is comfort in knowing that you have done your best to honor people's wishes. It seems to me that plans lower our anxiety, and our fears.

Advent is a time of reflection and planning. John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus. I don't think that Jesus could have done the work that he did, or made the progress that he did, if it weren't for John. John laid out a plan to prepare us for Jesus' life and ministry.

A good plan is often about asking the right questions. Sometimes the questions are hard, like who do you want to raise your children if you die. I mean, what 30-something wants to think about that? Or where will I live when I can no longer walk up and down stairs? Even 80-somethings don't like to think about that. Now if we are lucky, we might never need that plan.

As a culture and a society, we seem reluctant to ask ourselves the hard questions. We would rather just continue on our merry way – that is until we have no other option but to address the issue – and by then our options are often very limited.

Advent is a good time to give some thought to how you might make a plan to be a better disciple of Jesus. We all have room for improvement! Advent is the time to ask these questions, Advent is the time to reflect on our lives and see where we can do better. To ask the right questions, like John the Baptist did in the wilderness. To call each other to repentance, to a change of life, to a new way of seeing and being. John, the prickly prophet announcing Jesus' arrival, knew that this road was not easy. In truth, maybe he didn't know how just hard it would actually be, but he did know that his path was not certain. John took great risks to be all that God called him to be.

How about you? What risks have you taken for the Gospel lately? How have you let God soften your heart and open your eyes? What risks has our church taken for the Gospel? Like most, we have done some things well and other things pretty poorly. Perhaps we have not seen the needs around us, or we have seen, but not done anything about it. As a society, we have largely ignored the prophets warning us of all sorts of things, from global warming, to our reliance on cheap goods, to the plight of the poor, both here under our noses and around the globe.

How do we start to turn the corner, to make amends, to change? It is not necessarily easy work, but it is the work that God, and John, calls us to. It is the work of new life and new ways to be. Are you willing to try? Are you willing to hear John's call, to let go of your fears and let God lead you?

Amen.