

**St. Andrew's Cathedral**

Jackson, Mississippi

Sermon for December 10, 2017 ~ Advent 2B

The Very Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

We gather today to be nourished through Word and Sacrament. Today's menu includes the propers for the Second Sunday of Advent: the prophetic message of Isaiah, the hopeful song of the Psalmist, the pastoral encouragement of the Apostle Peter, and Mark's account of John the Baptist's call to repentance in preparation for the arrival of God's Messiah.

Last week, I sent a letter to the parish to share the good news that Bishop Seage has given the green light for the Vestry to move to the next stage of transition in February, the appointment of a profile committee. This is an exciting moment because it means the Cathedral community has manifested signs of health and vitality and those signs have been recognized. It is also exciting because it is a reminder that the work of transition that has been going so well must continue even while the process that leads to the election and call of a new Dean is underway. The transition is not over.

Advent is a particularly appropriate season for us to spend time in prayerful discernment about the journey of transition. Advent is all about transition. The texts on our menu today and throughout the season are all about transition. Like Isaiah, the Psalmist, John, and Peter, we find ourselves in a time of transition. One era is ending. A new era is emerging.

We have mixed emotions about transitions – something familiar is over; something new and unknown is beginning. When faced with times like this, our normal reaction is to say, "Stop the world, I want to get off." We are not the first people of faith to have that kind of reaction. That's what prompted those preachers of the past to speak words of encouragement, hope, and reassurance to God's anxious people; "Remain Calm! God is in the future we are facing and God has our best interests in mind. Something incredibly good is about to take place and we are going to be instrumental in it."

Times of transition are times of preparation. Intentional interim ministers share a conviction that congregations in transition have a rare spiritual opportunity to explore where they have been, where they are today, and where God's vision will take them in the days and years just ahead. We also believe that this is a time to make any adjustments that are discovered in this exploratory adventure – strengthening ties with the wider Church, leadership and organizational changes, and other preparations that the time allows to be ready to welcome a new era of mission.

To the faithful People of God in every time of transition and in every place, Isaiah says, "Take comfort! Prepare the way," the Psalmist says, "Truly, God's salvation is very near," John the Baptist says, "Repent and get ready for the Messianic age," and Peter says, "This time of waiting is a time to become the people God has called you to be!" These are messages about intentional, purposeful transition from where you have been to where you will be, messages about a glorious future in which God's Messiah dwells in your midst, messages that replace anxiety with hopeful expectation. Today's biblical menu is highly nutritious for all who engage in discernment about experiences of transition.

The Episcopal Church in Mississippi has a remarkable heritage. Those of you who are the present day heirs of that inheritance in this Cathedral Church are being called, equipped, and nurtured to ensure that you invest it wisely in love for God and your neighbors. Another prophet, Jeremiah, has a word from God for us in such a time, “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Peter leaves us with a question: “What sort of people ought you to be as you wait?” That’s the main question, isn’t it, at any time, really, but especially over the next year or so? What sort of people ought you to be as you wait? Because that will be the sort of people who are called to share in God’s mission in this place and the sort of people whose common life will draw others to you or drive them away. I join Peter in inviting you to ponder that question as you engage in the work of transition.

Isaac Watts composed a hymn that addresses Peter’s question in a beautiful way. It may be an Advent hymn. The hymn writer likens the members of the church to spicy trees planted and watered by the Creator.

Christ hath a garden walled around,  
A Paradise of fruitful ground,  
Chosen by love and fenced by grace  
From out the world's wide wilderness.

Like trees of spice his servants stand,  
There planted by his mighty hand;  
By Eden's gracious streams, that flow  
To feed their beauty where they grow.

Awake, O wind of heav'n and bear  
Their sweetest perfume through the air:  
Stir up, O south, the boughs that bloom,  
Till the beloved Master come:

That he may come, and linger yet  
Among the trees that he hath set;  
That he may evermore be seen  
To walk amid the springing green.

What sort of people ought you to be? What sort of blossoms, fragrance, and fruit will you bear as you wait with hope, purpose, and expectation?