



## In-between time Vocation

Rev Cate Thorn

Year B, Advent2

Isaiah 40: 1-8; Mark 1: 1-8

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We hear from the gospel of Mark today, which is interesting in the context of Advent because the gospel of Mark, like that of John, is one without a nativity story. The good news of Jesus the Christ begins, for Mark, with John the Baptist pointing to the one who is to come, to Jesus, the Son of God, who John will baptise with water. In Mark we hear Isaiah's prophetic words echo. John the baptiser's the messenger, the one who cries out in the wilderness, to prepare the way for the One who is to come. Mark's gospel may not have a nativity, a story of Jesus' birth, but it does have a story about Jesus and this story begins by telling the audience **Jesus** is the One who is to come. The earliest of the gospels, Mark wants his hearers to understand that this good news story is fulfilment of ancient prophecy. This isn't new innovation, John the Baptist steps into his place as part of this unfolding story. The One John the baptiser points to comes in continuity with the tradition, will issue in the fulfilment of God's promises of restoration.

The author of Mark wants his audience to know that in the figure of Jesus something happens. Jesus is the One who is to come, brought to life fulfilled God's promise. Jesus' coming, entering into and being known in the world, has changed things. Such presence is here, knowable and able to be encountered.

The season of Advent is an in-between time. We ritualise the memory of the Jesus who came and recognise we're in between that then time and the promised time of Jesus' return. Today's readings reflect the experience of people living through in-between times. We do as well. Each day we live between a time of birth and a time of death. We don't do this very consciously, mostly we blunder through. We've occasional flashes of insight for we're creatures, as Ecclesiastes puts it, in whom God "has put a sense of past and future," we can know life has beginning and end.

We know that present circumstances, events happening now are result of what preceded them. This awareness that action has consequence in lived time could direct us to be mindful now. It could make us more careful. Could remind us we're responsible beyond ourselves. It could locate us in our temporality. We're visitors here, for a short time in gifted place. In between time is our habitat.

Isaiah describes this from and to this way "the time of the people has been served, penalty's been paid, double hand for all her sins received." The people have proven themselves inconstant even so God's word stands forever. With time served **now**, Isaiah declares, is the time of preparation for the coming of our God, a theme reverberating in the gospel. John the baptiser has vocation in his time to call people to repent. **Now** is the time to prepare for the coming Messiah, the One to whom John points. Jesus that Messiah also points to the God from whom he comes, and to the time of restoration and fulfilment, known only to God, that is to come.

As with Mark many of us are here because we've sense that in Jesus' coming something changed. A sense of companioning, oftentimes despite us, continues, can be encountered and known. So this way of God spoken of in the in-between times,

is it something we're to know in time to come or, as with the incarnation, is it something we know **in time** now? Today's readings reflect the experience of people aware of a time when things were a certain way, aware there'll be a time when things will be different. People who hope, pray and work for a time that's better, restored, other than the way they are or were. People who know they're in transition.

Implicit in claiming we live in in-between times, is that we know a before, that now is different from that before, and in our now, we hope for a future that will be different. We, as in our biblical text, hope for the way of God to be made real. Is it possible to hope for something still to come if we've not experienced it? Is the way of God something we've known, recognised, experienced and so wait for? Else how would we know?

Isaiah who's named a prophet foretells what's to come. Isaiah's prophetic vocation reveals God in vision and word. From in-between time within the faith story Isaiah's prophetic voice brought warning, comfort and hope for God's people. The author of Mark chooses in his telling of Jesus, to reiterate these prophetic words of hope and promise. Perhaps he's vocation to connect and renew the faith story of old. John the baptiser, of prophetic vocation also, is warning messenger of hope in in-between time, pointing to the one more powerful who's to come. Jesus vocation, we might dare to propose is to be God incarnate. God made real in time and flesh, with us for a while. And Jesus tells of an in-between time for he points to a consummation yet to come, the time known only by Yahweh.

Each in this continuing story has vocation, a vocation that is theirs for the benefit of that which is to come. *Vocation* has ancient roots in the Latin word *vocare*, to call. It conveys the notion God has designs on us. Vocation is unique, expressing the rich texture and value of our lives **for** the life of the world.

The vocation of those we hear of in today's reading is to bring hope in in-between times. It acknowledges the context of location, points to that which is to come and connects with those who are to come. To those who will inhabit the story after us. To those who will bring to fruition the hope and promise of this God story in the next to come, the next to be future. It is a living forward.

"You may not," John O'Donohue writes, "be able to do much about the great problems of the world or to change the situation you are in, but if you can awaken the eternal beauty and light of your soul, you will bring light wherever you go. The gift of life is given to us for ourselves and also to bring peace, courage, and compassion to others."<sup>1</sup>

Of vocation Frederick Buechner reflects, "The place God calls you to, is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."<sup>2</sup>

Where the hunger of the world beyond you  
Meets the hunger of the world within you:  
May you find yourself in this place.

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<sup>1</sup> John O'Donohue, *Eternal Echoes*

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2022/11/14/vocation>