

Whiplash (Again!)

Moving from last week's gospel to this week's, you can not help it if your neck starts feeling sore, because what we get with these two readings is a bad case of whiplash!

Last week we are in the end times, a blackened sun, a disappearing moon and falling stars, when all things at long last come conclusively, finally and forever, to an end.

But barely have we begun to feel what the ends like when this week we're whisked back at the speed of light to an early morning springtime, the new day just dawning, and it is here that we are unceremoniously plopped down, back, to the very beginning!

"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight!'"

Why this whiplash during the first two weeks of Advent?

If you expected Advent to be a season of quiet meditations and peaceful longings, well, you've expected wrong!

In Mark's Advent, like the rest of Mark's gospel, we are quite literally grabbed by the shirt collars, hoisted up off our feet, and shaken into this new world that God is dreaming for us — a world so different from our play it safe, risk averse, look out for number one, comfort zone.

Which is why, perhaps, we are so rudely given this case of whiplash today.

Let's face it, we live in times that are more prosperous than ever before.

For those in developed countries, material goods and creature comforts are everywhere, at least for most folks.

Food and shelter are not only available but are abundant, and lifespans are increasing — and yet — our comfort zone, the place we put ourselves almost instinctively — is to see this world, and “the other,” particularly the least among us, with a sense of fear, of dread, of apprehension.

If the **end times** presume that God will at long last finish the job of straightening the paths of this world; so that the poor are welcome, the blind see, the lame walk — then taking us back to **the beginning** is an unmistakable reminder that our primary task on this earth isn't about figuring out ways to live the good life, our primary task is the day in and day out effort to begin straightening these paths — by living lives dedicated to welcoming the deserving and undeserving poor, by helping, particularly the blind in spirit, to see, by helping, especially the lame of heart, to walk.

This is **the beginning**, and every day that we are given the grace to open our eyes one more time, to see a new sunrise, to breath the clean air, well, it is one more chance to follow, and not merely admire, this strange Messiah, Jesus, who turns all of our world's upside down.

It's never easy.

And it shouldn't be easy — because nothing truly worth striving for ever comes easy.

And this is the most significant struggle we can ever sign up for because at it's root is the magnificent destiny to which we are each of us called.

Our destiny, and our collective struggle to be worthy of it, is beautifully spoken in Nicolas Kazantzakis' meditation, entitled The Cry.

It's a mediation I try to wiggle into at least one sermon every year precisely because it reminds us of where we come from and to where we are going.

"Blowing through heaven and earth, and in our hearts, and in the heart of every living thing, is an enormous breath, a great Cry, which we call God.

Plant life wished to continue its motionless sleep next to stagnant waters, but the Cry leaped up within it and violently shook its roots:

'Away, let go of the earth, walk!'

Had the tree been able to think and judge, it would have cried: 'I don't want to.

What are you urging me to do?

You are demanding the impossible!'

But the Cry, without pity, keeps shaking its roots and shouting, 'Away, let go of the earth, walk!'

It shouts in this way for thousands of eons; and lo! as a result of struggle ... and desire, life escapes the motionless tree and is liberated.

Animals appear, worms, making themselves at home in water and mud.

'We're just fine,' they say.

'We have peace and security; we're not budging!'

But the terrible Cry hammers itself pitilessly into their loins.

'Leave the mud!

Stand up!

Give birth to your betters!

'We don't want to!

We cannot!

'You cannot; but I can ... stand up!'

And lo! after thousands of eons, humans emerge, trembling on still unsolid legs.

The human being is a centaur, (half man and half horse), his hoofs are planted in the ground, but his body, from breast to head is worked on and tormented by the merciless Cry.

He fights, for thousands of eons, to draw himself, like a sword out of his animal-like scabbard.

Man calls in despair, 'Where can I go, I have reached the pinnacle, beyond is the abyss?!'

And the Cry answers, 'I am beyond.

Stand up!' Kazanzachis, Letter to Greco.

You've heard the old saying "You become what you eat?"

Well, there's an even older saying:

"You become what you worship."

Today, starting once more at **the beginning**, Jesus invites us to worship with our walk, not just our talk, in our daily encounters with one

another, this strange God; and in worshipping, he invites us to bend so that we may look more and more like this odd God.

Not because that's how we choose to do things, but because this is the way God is.

And as image bearers of God, it is the way we are meant to be, precisely because our destiny is not to simply muddle through this life, then hope we've earned enough gold stars to convince St Peter to let us into the heavenly country club – where there will be hazard free golf and all you can eat shrimp forever and ever...

No!

Our destiny is to become one with God; indeed, our destiny is to become God.

Heresy you say?

Then I am in good company!

Gene Peterson says:

"You are kingdom subjects.

Now, live like it.

Live out your God-created identity."

And St. Augustine says as we gather for Holy Communion:

"Receive who you are.

Become what you receive."

And Meister Eckhart says, "The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me; my eye and God's eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing, one love."

Of course, if you're still having trouble giving up your old way of thinking about our true destiny, then listen to Jesus:

"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one.

As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

Something happens when we return to the beginning, and take up again this strange faith that turns all we think we know — on its head.

Something happens when we decline to follow our own best thinking, when we give, especially to the undeserving, to the dopes, to the ones who have only themselves to blame for their situation.

Something happens here, back at the beginning.

God happens.

May God happen to you this day...

+amen

