Welcome to the Second Sunday of Advent – the Sunday of Peace. Today’s Gospel is taken from the Gospel of Mark 1:1-8.

If last week’s gospel revealed Advent to be a season of hope in the darkness of our lives, then this week’s gospel reveals Advent to be a season of time in the wilderness. It reflects the reality of our lives.

I suspect each one of you could tell about a time in the wilderness. As difficult as the wilderness may be it is the place in which we prepare the way of the Lord. After the Israelites left Egypt they went to the wilderness. It was their preparation for the Promised Land. After Jesus was baptized he went to the wilderness. It was his preparation for his public ministry. And in today’s gospel John the Baptizer appears in the wilderness helping “*the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem*” prepare for the coming of “*the one who is more powerful*.” That’s what time in the wilderness does. It prepares the way of the Lord.

The wilderness I’m talking about is not the geography around us but the geography within us. It is an interior landscape. There is nowhere to hide in the wilderness. There are no illusions or distractions. The wilderness strips us of all pretense and we are left to face up to ourselves, to examine our hearts, and confess the truth about our lives.

This wilderness isn’t so much a place of exile or punishment as it is a place of self-discovery. We discover that we can no longer live by our own self-sufficiency. That doesn’t mean we are insufficient. It means there is more to life and more to us than what our own self-sufficiency can give. The wilderness always proves otherwise. In the wilderness we ultimately discover that we are in need of have no where else to turn but to “*the one who is more powerful*.” It reveals our un-self-sufficiency.

Maybe that’s why John the Baptizer is our wilderness guide. Maybe that’s why he is called the Forerunner of Christ. Maybe that’s why he is the voice crying out in the wilderness, “*Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight*.” John knows what he is talking about. Look at him – clothed with camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, eating locusts and honey. That’s more than a description of his wardrobe and diet. It reveals John’s interior condition, the state of his heart. He knows his own un-self-sufficiency and entrusts it to “*the one who is more powerful*.”

The un-self-sufficiency revealed by the wilderness opens our minds to a larger story, opens our heart to a new life, and turns our gaze to the one who is coming.

So let me ask you this. Where has your life become overly self-sufficient? What might un-self-sufficiency look like in your life? Maybe we begin to get at that by looking at the ways we live (or try to live) self-sufficient lives. Here’s what I am wondering.

* I wonder if our self-sufficiency is sometimes disguised as busyness, never ending to do lists.
* I wonder if our self-sufficiency is revealed in the comparisons and competition that often hide in our relationships and interactions with each other.
* I wonder if self-sufficiency is at the core of many of the judgments we make about others.
* I wonder if some of our fears, worries, anxieties, and anger come when we think our self-sufficiency is being threatened.
* I wonder if the many expectations we place on ourselves and others about how our life should be, begins in an attitude of self-sufficiency.

I’m not suggesting that we are helpless. We’re not. We have responsibility for ourselves and to others. We have resources and abilities. However, to the degree we live overly self-sufficient lives we close ourselves off. We isolate. We declare the way of the Lord to be a closed road. Maybe the greatest tragedy is that when we live from a place of self-sufficiency we make ourselves the more powerful one and we have no need of each other or of Christ, the one who is coming. Maybe our self-sufficiency is really the only thing that ever keeps Christ from coming to us.

So, the wilderness of Advent might be the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Amen.