

Second Sunday of Advent: December 4th

Romans 15:4-13

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It is an anxious time in the world, especially if you pay attention to the earth. The increase in hurricanes, droughts, and wildfire heightens our hearing of John the Baptist's panic-inducing proclamation "Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance... every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." And that fire no longer seems like a metaphor!

In my backyard garden, the only crop that grew well this summer was okra. Other amateur gardeners experienced the lettuce/tomatoes/peppers that grew small this year, if they grew much at all. But not the okra.

In the heat the okra stretched skyward, yellow trumpets transforming daily into a plethora of tender pods—more than we could harvest! The garden is bare now, but I still remember the tallest okra I've ever seen flourishing in a drought.

If I'm honest, both this reading and my summer garden made me anxious, like the world is barreling towards catastrophe I cannot avert. But as much as John and changes in the earth demand I take notice, there is good news. John calls us to repent *because* "the kingdom of heaven has come near" and we are called to *join it*.

The kingdom of heaven blossoms despite climate change. The good news stands tall: God is with us and will not abandon us to our sin and suffering, even that which we inflicted irreparably on the earth. God is not content to let brokenness have the final word. Christ's love grows despite adversity, refusing to fail even when the rest of the world withers. The world is changing, but the good news does not.

Prayer: Merciful God, help us hear the voice in the wilderness, calling us to turn back to you. Help us to see how we are not powerless in you, how we can be your hands of hope in a world desperate for your love; help us to see where new growth is happening even amid disturbing change. Amen.

Contemplation: What has been a difficult part of your life lately, and where do you see God at work in it?