

**December 7, 2014, Second Sunday of Advent**  
**Joanne Blaney, Maryknoll lay missioner, Brazil**

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; Psalm 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14; Second Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8

*The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."*  
— Mark 1:3

How difficult it is to wait! Luiz and the other men in the prison that I visit in São Paulo know this well. Many waited for years before getting their "sentence." Now they wait to "get out." They spend most of their time in their cell waiting with nothing to do.

In today's Advent readings, we hear that "in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home." The readings speak of active waiting as we, like John the Baptist, respond to the call to prepare the way of the Lord and make straight the paths of God.

How are we called to make straight these paths in a world where the gap between rich and poor continues to grow or in areas where millions of people are at risk of death due to famine caused by drought?

In my ministry with Restorative Justice, we work with juvenile offenders and groups in prison. We strive to empower those imprisoned in their past to use the "waiting time" to listen, to heal from the violence they have suffered and passed on to others, and to transform their desire for vengeance into forgiveness and a commitment to justice. Luiz, on the first day of the course, proudly displayed a photo of himself drinking beer at age seven and bragging about his strength. "Everyone knows not to mess with me." Months later, he showed his photo and proclaimed to the group, "I am not this person anymore and no longer want to be this person. I am learning other values in this group and now know what it really means to be strong. I hope that my future will be different."

Recently, more than 3,000 people from Brazil gathered for an ecumenical conference on "Faith: In Search of a Society of Living Well." The diversity of participants was striking: Guarani indigenous struggling for land rights, urban youth striving to stop the tide of homicides and violence; poor rural people struggling to preserve the waterways. In a faith context, we were reminded over and over again of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all creation. The indigenous struggle for land rights is connected to the struggle to recover the Tiete river which is also linked to the one billion people in our world living in misery.

God dwells here in the fragility of all creation. In prayer, we celebrated the Divine Presence of God in each of these struggles. They are voices crying out in the desert for us to "prepare the way of the Lord" by working for a society, a planet in which all can "live well"—one that strives to live more fully the Gospel by working and sharing together in solidarity and equality, rather than one focused on consumerism and individualism. "God's glory shall be revealed and all people shall see it together" in the manner in which we are able to truly listen to the Word and involve ourselves in bringing about more justice in our world.

John the Baptist reminds us of our baptismal commitment in the Spirit. Our reading from Isaiah says, "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term...."

During this second week of Advent, may each of us live out in a fuller way our call to bring good news and comfort to those who are oppressed. May we touch into the courage that comes from the Spirit and commit ourselves to an action this week that brings about more justice and equality in our world.

Let us heed the call to "[g]et you up to a high mountain, ...herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, ...herald of good tidings..."

Thus, we may help to bring about the day when "[s]teadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other."