

The Truth Disclosed
2 Peter 3:8-15a, Advent 2, Year B
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There is a scene at the very end of the film “Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull,” in which the Soviet Colonel Irina Spalko gazes into the face of a crystallized alien skull in search of secret knowledge that, she believes, will give her untold power. Irina stares intently at the skull and says, “I want to know! I want to know! Tell me everything! I’m ready!”

Psychically, the alien begins transferring knowledge to Irina—*all* knowledge, about everything—and soon it is too much for the colonel to bear. She screams for the truth to stop flowing, but it is too late. Irina dissolves into a haze of dust, and she is no more.

“Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull” is a bad movie. If you haven’t already, please don’t order it from Netflix. But this particular scene is tantalizing. Irina Spalko thinks knowledge of the truth of things will give her a kind of freedom and power, but when she sees the whole truth disclosed in front of her, she can’t bear it.

On this Second Sunday of Advent in Year B of our liturgical calendar, we read a much-neglected but potent passage from Peter’s second letter, written as a kind of final testament before his own martyrdom. Peter writes because there are Christians even in his own day, just a few decades after the Resurrection, who have come to doubt that Jesus will ever return. God seems to have changed his mind or at least tarry, and so they have begun to give up on the new life to which they were called as followers of the Way of Jesus and instead lapse back into an “anything goes” manner of pagan living.

This distresses Peter, and in his letter he diagnoses what’s going on with uncanny accuracy. Such people, he warns, will call a lie the truth for so long that they begin to believe it is so. And then they will have no compunction at all about living in ways that are both grossly and subtly destructive. Before today’s passage, Peter says, “They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed.”

And then, in today’s passage, Peter lets the ball drop. God has not changed his mind, Peter says. The good is still the good. Darkness is still darkness. And the day of the Lord’s return to right all things will still come:

“Do not ignore this one fact, beloved,” Peter counsels, “that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to

repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, *and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.*”

That sounds a lot like the scene from Indiana Jones, except this time it’s no alien fantasy. What the return of God to the world will mean is that all falsehood will dissolve away. All pretense to call “good” that which is not good, will disappear. Everything will be disclosed for what it is.

Will that be good news for us? Will it be good news for me...for you? What if someone arrived who could peer through our eyes and into our souls and name the real truth? What if that one revealed to the world with clarity the worst thing we’d ever done, the thing we’d covered up so smoothly that no one discovered it or interpreted it for what it really was? What if all the truth about us—not our clever interpretation of the truth, but the *actual thing*—were laid out for all to see? Could we bear it, or would we, like Irina Spalko, scream for the truth to stop flowing and collapse into dust in the face of it?

These are interesting hypothetical questions, if indeed they are hypothetical. But the writer here is Peter, the same Peter who says earlier in the letter, “I was there on the Mount of Transfiguration when God the Father said of Jesus, ‘This is my Son, with whom I am well pleased.’” This is Peter who broke bread, traveled dusty roads, and walked on water, albeit briefly, with the living Jesus. If we don’t believe *him*, we might as well throw the whole thing out.

Maybe it would help if we were willing to name the truth *before* Jesus comes. In point of fact, that is what John the Baptist calls us to do in the Gospel this day, this Advent. A quick grammatical note: The editors of the New Testament get the punctuation in today’s Gospel passage—punctuation which isn’t present in the original Greek text of Mark—a bit wrong. John the Baptist quotes from the Prophet Isaiah, and what he actually says to us and to all is, “*In the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord.*”

And so, the first truth we must name this Advent is that *our lives are wilderness places*. Oh, we present to the world manicured gardens, or, more aptly this holiday season, cozy, well-appointed holiday homes, with tinsel and candlelight and fuzzy sweaters that invite hugs. But we know that this Charlie Brown plastic-and-metal Christmas tree forest hides the true wilderness that defines most of us, most of the time.

The wilderness of our lives includes grudges, meanness, pride, pettiness, undercutting envy, and self-doubt. And since we’re called to disclose, to ourselves and to God, the *whole*

truth, for some of us the wilderness may even include undiscovered criminality, immorality in behavior, and sin.

In the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord. Repentance, which both Peter and John the Baptist set as the centerpiece of their counsel to us, means changing the disposition of one's heart—changing course—and this cannot happen if we don't look back at the crooked path we've walked and see where ugly signposts have marked our way. This Advent season, we are called to stare into the desert parts of our lives and claim the truth of who we have sometimes been, even if we have over time convinced ourselves of the contrary, so that we truly can begin to walk a different way. We are to prepare for the Lord's coming.

But there is yet another side to disclosing the whole truth of us. There is also that *goodness* we've forgotten, that beauty and grace that have marked our lives; which we did not understand, or which was beaten down by someone else to make us embarrassed, or which seemed so fleeting it didn't register. Remember, we are created to be more glorious than angels. They are not created in God's very image, but *we are*. Disclosing the whole truth this Advent season *also* means claiming your beauty, your wonder, *your infinite value* from the wilderness in your life that has tried to starve these things and dry them into dust.

Peter says, "Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting...strive to be found by Jesus Christ at peace."

Peace comes when we name clearly, honesty, and completely the truth about ourselves—the ugly and the beautiful—and give that truth to Jesus of our initiative rather than waiting for it to be awfully revealed on the day of his coming. Irina Spalko said, "I want to know! I want to know! I am ready," but she wasn't prepared to see the truth. By God's grace, we can be. The Lord, Peter promises, is patient, not wanting anyone to perish. God loves us, and because he loves us God wants to wilderness in us to dissolve away so that the beauty can bloom; not as the pretend plastic and tinsel of a department store Christmas display, but as a holy garden—like Eden—in which the Lord will rejoice at the day of his coming.

Blessed Advent, people of God. *Amen.*