

2nd Sunday of Advent B
Ann Garrido

Lectionary: 6

Isa 40:1-5, 9-11

Ps 85:9-10-11-12, 13-14

2 Pet 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/121017.cfm>

Possible preaching themes:

- How should we understand the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus?
- The “delay of the Parousia” considered through the lens of God’s time
- What do Christians mean by the end of our planet compared to the way scientists talk about it?

Possible scientific resources:

- **Genetics**
 - For an accessible introduction to DNA, genes, chromosomes, and genomes: <https://www.famlii.com/what-is-a-chromosome-simple-definitions-for-human-chromosomes-dna-and-genes/>
 - For charts explaining how family relationships are understood by genealogists and the percentage of DNA shared among family members: <https://www.famlii.com/how-much-dna-genetically-related-between-family-members/#:~:text=DNA%20is%20inherited%20randomly%3B%20therefore,tree%2C%20than%20from%20the%20other>
 - For a description of how genetic material is passed on between generations: <https://daily.istor.org/the-genetics-of-cousin-marriage/>
- **Scientific imaging of the “end” of the earth** (as compared and contrasted to biblical imaging)
 - For a description of four potential ways earth (at least for humans) will end: <https://bigthink.com/starts-with-a-bang/earth-end/>
 - On the end of the earth in 1-1.5 billion years from an astronomical lens: <https://www.science.org/content/article/earth-wont-die-soon-thought>
- **How physicists think about time**
 - Physicist Carlo Rovelli’s writes on “The Order of Time” and why time itself may be a human illusion: <https://www.sciencefriday.com/articles/solving-the-mystery-of-time-flow/>
 - For an accessible introduction to Einstein’s notion of time and special relativity: <https://www.space.com/time-is-relative-twin-paradox>

Homily outline based on the theme of genetics:

- **Setting the scene around Christmas tree**
 - Presents appearing under the Christmas tree
 - One special gift is a DNA kits from [23andme](https://www.23andme.com)

- Such kits confirm old and unveil new information on our family tree
- **Enter John the Baptist**
 - The evangelists have gathered because John the Baptist regularly drops by, but since he won't stick around until Christmas, so he opens his 23andme gift now.
 - He is suspicious of new technologies, but curious like the evangelists about what it will reveal.
- **Unveiling John's Old Testament connections**
 - 6.25% DNA in common with Elijah the Tishbite. The only other biblical person recorded to wear camel hair and a leather belt was one of the great prophets of the Old Testament. He challenged kings for their lack of faith and called people back to the covenant (2 Kgs 1:8).
 - 3.13% DNA shared with Isaiah, the first to talk about a voice crying out to prepare a *road in the wilderness* for God to travel into town on. Something got a bit frayed at the edge of that chromosome' telomeres and the Baptist turned up as a *voice in the wilderness* crying out to prepare God's way. Sometimes that happens in the passing on genes.
 - 1.56% DNA with Malachi who talked about God sending his messenger before him to prepare the way, a messenger who would turn the hearts of fathers toward their children and the hearts of children back toward their fathers.
- **Curiosity around John's New Testament connections**
 - Everyone is *most* curious to know is how much overlap there is between John's and Jesus' DNA. This has long been a discussion topic among the evangelists.
 - **Mark** thinks that there won't be much overlap at all, for Jesus and John were very different sorts of peoples. John was an ascetic who fasted, living in the desert. Jesus loved to eat and drink and spent plenty of time in cities and towns. John was harsh, quick to condemn. Jesus spoke of mercy, while John anticipated heaven raining down fire. Jesus was one who said now was the time for second chances.
 - **John** agrees with Mark. He recalls that before Jesus' baptism, the Baptist said he'd never known Jesus before (John 1:33), but then acknowledges that Jesus was with him, at least for a short time (John 3:26).
 - **Luke** is sure that Jesus' DNA is going to overlap with the Baptist's DNA at least 6.25%. That is less than the 12.5% between first cousins, but average for a first-cousin-once-removed. Luke believes that John's mother and Jesus' mother were related, but is not exactly sure how: Elizabeth was at least a generation older than Mary. But what Luke wants everyone to know is that even though Jesus and John were quite different (and even though both had disciples roaming Israel at the same time), there was no competition between the two. They both were devoted to same God and wanted to bring about God's Kingdom.
 - Instead of John showing the evangelists his DNA pie chart, he holds it close to his chest: "This for me to know and you to argue about some more. You know these DNA tests are very dangerous. If an insurance company were to get ahold of them... well, they might want to raise my rate for pre-existing conditions." But then he laughs, "Of course, I don't think I'll be living long enough to find out."
- **Connection to the Paschal Mystery**
 - And in that moment a cloud settles over the festivities. Here is the one thing that binds the Baptist and Jesus together more than family bloodline: the blood that each will shed in being faithful to their respective vocations on behalf of God's Kingdom.
 - There are many ways of serving the Lord, but all of them involve letting go of one's personal hopes and dreams on behalf of a Kingdom greater than oneself. Both Jesus and John fully aware of that. We should be, too.
 - Yet the cloud only lasts for a moment, because God's coming Kingdom is such a joyous

thing to look forward to that it is worth the cost, even the cost of our earthly lives. Next week, on “Rejoice” Sunday we will don pink just to set the record straight on that front.

- Wherever our love for the Kingdom overlaps with another’s love for the Kingdom, we are no longer distant cousins, but brothers and sisters: sharing one Father and belonging to one family.

- **Closing:** “Okay,” John the Baptist admits as he slips out the door with a chocolate-dipped Christmas locust, “Maybe these DNA tests tell us something important after all.”

Tags: DNA, family bonds, genetics, John the Baptist

About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way’s sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.