

The Third Sunday of Advent – Year B – John the Baptist
Isaiah 61.1-4,8-11; 1 Thessalonians 5.16-24; John 1.6-8,19-28

Today – we light the pink advent candle – is not only in remembrance of John the Baptist, but is also Gaudete Sunday. We have passed the midpoint of Advent and we can lighten the mood a little – we light a pink candle – and in some churches the priests will wear rose – the Lord is near...

When you say it like that, it almost makes you want to go home and put some decorations up – in anticipation of celebrating the coming of – and welcoming – a very special guest into our homes, our life and our world – Jesus... the one we're waiting for...

Gaudete – Rejoice – don't lose heart – have joy in expecting, waiting, hoping, praying as we wait on the Lord...

'Those who came from Jerusalem asked John – Who are you?'

I wonder if you have ever been out and about and had to talk to someone you don't know – masks adorned and wondered that same question?

I wonder if you – like me – have actually met other people in a different place than usual – and they have said hello – and you have thought 'who are you?'

Unless we have distinctive features there can be something mysterious about people behind masks, can't there?

And this is what it was like for people who came across John the Baptist – who are you?

John didn't want to be defined by his characteristics – just as other people might not want to be defined by obvious characteristics such as disability – or hair colour – or skin colour – they want to be defined by who they are – despite looks or conditions...

And John's reply was the same – I am none of the things you suggest – but actually the one who is preparing the way –

The way for what?

This is his unique call and always has been – not just on the banks of the Jordan as a grown man proclaiming the way to come – but as a yet unborn baby within Elizabeth his mother – as Mary visited and John stirred into life by the presence of the life within Mary – the life waiting to be presented to the world to shine the light. John – like us all – has been called to play his part in the coming – and living out the light of the world.

The Gospel reading begins with the absence of light – John is to be the witness for the light to come – shaping the pathway through wastelands – the wastelands of our hearts and our material, earthbound lives

John is saying 'I AM NOT' in order to prepare the way for the one who will declare 'I AM'

It is only when the light comes in the person of Jesus that John's role will be fully appreciated and acknowledged – and actually acknowledged by Jesus himself..

Isn't it interesting to see that at the time of his ministry – John was deemed to be a great one – a Messiah – and when Jesus later asks his own apostles who they think he is – they reply that some say he might be John the Baptist reincarnated.

John's Gospel is very clear though, that John the Baptist is the *witness* to the light – and not the light.

We are called to be John the Baptists in our own context and lives – we are called to make way for the light – to help the light break through the solid darkness that blocks out parts of the human landscape from loving peace, kindness and justice and equality.

It is inevitable that behind a great-light person or story there is one who has prepared the way and this calls for great humility and vision – even in the dark – to shine our own light on the light to come – that the light

will continue on as people prepare and pass on, prepare and pass on – the baton of life and the baton of light so that it can evolve and grow and reclaim the dark places of humanity and the world.

The great Henry Moore once said in an interview that he recalled the slag heaps of his Yorkshire mining village home – pit heaps – great wastelands – unburnable rubbish – playing on them as a youth. He also recalled how he used to have to go into the dark cellar of his home to fetch apples for his father to bake – and it scared him, giving an eye to the light in the crack of the door. And when he sculpts, like that time, he is always looking for a way out – a flicker of light in the dark. The holes in his sculptures are significant for him – the light is let in and the light always wins.

So let's take heart from John the Baptist today – and from Henry Moore and see where we can prepare the way for brighter light and love to shine through in our daily lives – sculpturing our own expressions of what it means to let in the light in the dark places we encounter, all the while trusting that the one true divine light – of which we are a spark – is coming to show us the way, the truth – and the life.

Isaiah's prophetic words - 'The servant of the Lord said: The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour'

John's prophetic words 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord"'

Let us be the prophetic servants of the Lord we are called to be – and make straight the way of the Lord and let the light break through...

Creator God,
you have made us who we each are,
individual, distinctive, endowed with varied gifts and skills.
Help us to value others for what we each bring to any given situation.
And help us to value ourselves for what we may be able to offer
As we seek to bring the light of the world as we seek to follow the way of Jesus.
Amen.

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