

**The 2nd Sunday of Advent (6/12/2020) – Isaiah 40.1-11; Psalm 85.1-2,8-13; 2 Peter 3.8-15a; Mark 1.1-8**

The theme for this and other Advent times is about waiting – and Advent is a time of waiting symbolically – and literally – in the darkness. Nature is hibernating and our hearts too seem to hibernate – they seem to go to sleep sometimes as our heads and conditionings take over and we can become caught up in the material side of life and the shopping and glamour of Christmas –

But actually – it's not so obvious this year, is it – Covid-19 has taken hold and taken us into a dark place unprecedented in our lifetime – global in its geographic scale – and deep in its spiritual scale – everything about our social, economic, emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing has been taken into the dark and is clamouring to find a way out into the sunlight...

Advent couldn't have come at a better time – and never has there been a need for permission to be in the dark than now...

It was the same back then when Isaiah was bringing comfort and hope to the people of Israel captive in Babylonia – waiting for the day when they could return home –

But mistakenly thinking that it can be business as usual – no.... things back then – and today – will never be the same again.

But that doesn't mean they can't be better...

The day will come when sunlight will break through – but we're reminded by Peter how things work in God's world

<sup>8</sup>Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. <sup>9</sup>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

And what we should be doing in the meantime -

Leading lives of holiness and godliness, <sup>12</sup>waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire?

The fire of the tongues of the holy spirit perhaps.....?

Come thou long expected Jesus indeed.....

And today we are introduced by Mark to John the Baptist – the one paving the way for that day...

<sup>3</sup>the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight

Repent and be baptised John urges – why? So that God's love and purpose can be redeemed and restored

And Mark is very explicit in his proclaiming of the Gospel of the Good News of Christ – no stories – just straight into the fact that we all have to prepare a way for the Lord to be able to stride into our hearts and lives and begin his transforming acts of grace in our hearts and in the heart of the world.

It's very immediate – harsh almost – we are being implored into action.

And it begins as Genesis begins 'the beginning – of the good news of Jesus Christ...

And the good news is that Jesus is the 'Son of God.' This Gospel is written for Gentiles, and the title, Christ, does not have the same authority for Gentiles as for Jews. The title, Son of God, however, speaks to Gentiles of an all-powerful being. By including both titles, Christ and Son of God, Mark denotes Jesus' authority in terms that both Jews and Gentiles can appreciate.

But either way our call to action will involve a wilderness time – long, lonely, barren – not only physically but spiritually. The call didn't happen in the temple – but out there where those of faith had been tested and called in the past...

John lived in the wilderness and showed us what that meant – but he also proclaimed the way out of the wilderness – compelling us to drink from the water that becomes the water of life when we accept it as such... John is a foreshadowing – we follow him so that we can follow Jesus when he comes....

Mark is showing us the journey from wilderness and the dark place to freedom and light. And this journey is unique in that it won't promise that darkness won't consume again, but that in it we will have a shining light to show us the way...

I think the message is there – do not be afraid of being in the wilderness – embrace it because God is with us and he will show us he is with us – he will light the way so we will be able to see him with us – when the birth of his son takes place – then we will realise that God has been with us all along – in spirit – in our hearts – and in the way we are being guided from the darkness of all that removes peace and harmony so that restoration can be so...

Since March the world, nations, communities, churches – ourselves have felt like stragglers in the wilderness – but don't you think we have been in it all along because sustainable peace, harmony, justice and mercy and love and all things good have not been sustainable – have been short-lived with our wanting to control and compete for the top spots of life...

But now we are being stripped bare – one way or another it seems we will be shown the true reality of life – to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God by our side to show us the true way of love.

The message comes to John in the wilderness – and we are being shown the significance of the wilderness tradition in Jewish times – long before John and Jesus came along – a place of desolation and scarcity –.

The wilderness demands we step outside of our comfort zone – become more accessible to God – a God who is at work in a profound, transformational way in that emptiness – the wilderness can take us beyond the barren isolation of being in the desert of our lives – is can be a place where divine help and comfort and strength is at hand in our hour of need...

And so back then – knowing what we know about it now – you can see that never more was a peoples in need – of a saviour – of a healer – of a deliverer

And don't you think that today we are saying the same thing – never more was a peoples in need – of a saviour – of a healer – of a deliverer – and I am sure there are individual people all over realising the same thing about themselves in one way or another – are you in some areas of your life? I know in times past I certainly have...

To reach Jesus – we need to cross the desert that leads to the Jordan and the water of life..

We can see Advent as that wilderness time – of waiting – preparing — and prayer...

And another thing about the wilderness is that the air is clear – we can think straight – and wasn't that ever true when we were in the midst of lockdown – pure air – still and silent and unpolluted...

Near the beginning of CS Lewis' *Silver Chair*, Aslan meets Jill on a mountain-top and says to her, 'Here on the mountain, the air is clear and your mind is clear; as you drop down into Narnia, the air will thicken. Take great care that it does not confuse your mind.'

We are being prepared for the Lord's nativity – to experience our personal and collective encounter with the lord in a new way – to breathe in new and clean air of everlasting peace...

I leave you with this to ponder – who are the prophets you can hear today – calling you to action to change and mobilise greater peace and usefulness and purpose –

Imagine Isaiah speaking to you here and now – today – not to Jerusalem – but to you, part of generation 2020 – listen to what he is saying and think about how it makes you feel and how you can make it a reality in your heart and life today as you watch and wait...

<sup>1</sup>Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup>Speak tenderly to *these people of 2020* and cry to *them that they have served their term, that their penalty is paid....*

<sup>3</sup>A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup>Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. <sup>5</sup>Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people of *generation 2020* shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Amen

We pray:

People went to deserted places  
to hear what was most important.

Gathered here today, we remember our journey  
towards the things that will last for ever:  
righteousness, loving-kindness,  
peace and an eternal home in you, O God,