

Advent 3 – St Aidan’s – 13<sup>th</sup> December 2015

Reading: Luke 3:7-18

Theme: ‘The one who prepares the way’

Introduction

As we approach Christmas we really don’t feel like being chastised, let alone through our Gospel reading – well I don’t! We’ve lit the ‘joy’ candle and I want this to be a pleasant few weeks leading up to Christmas, even if it is a little busy.

However on this Third Sunday of Advent, the Lectionary delivers us to John the Baptist and his challenging words from the wilderness.

There is no getting to Bethlehem and the sweet baby in the manger without first hearing the rough prophet in the wilderness call us to repentance. This seems the obvious and first point to take from this Luke 3 text. Trying to sugar-coat John’s words is just not possible. Faithful and fruitful arrival at the manger will be possible only after careful self-examination and recommitment called for by John.

Suddenly the season of Advent takes on a new complexion, as we are called away from the glitz and tinsel of this pre-Christmas season to focus on the love of God and the care of neighbour.

Looking into the passage – Luke 3:7-18

As I re-read this passage the aspects that stood out to me were three-fold.

Firstly, there was the call by John to personal repentance and not relying on the past faith inheritance.

“And do not say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’.

For many, even in the Christian faith, say “We are Methodists or Presbyterians or we come from another tradition in our background.”

Here John is saying, ‘Sorry but that is irrelevant because faith is not inherited, it is personal and community in the here and the now.’ You need to make a decision for yourself based around what you believe and stop living on the ‘handed down faith’. Quite appropriate for us today to ponder upon in this Advent season.

Secondly, the question is asked of John three times, “What should we do then?”

Firstly the crowd asks the question and John responds with:

“The man with two tunics should share with him who has none,  
and the one who has food should do the same.” Vs 11

Secondly the tax collectors came to be baptized and asked the same question and John replies:

“Don’t collect any more than you are required to.” Vs 13

So often the tax collectors made huge profits extorting more than they should so as to make exorbitant profits. This was not on said John.

Thirdly the soldiers asked the same question and John replies:

“Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely – be content with your pay.” Vs 14b

It was common practice for soldiers to add to their wage by gaining extra money through extortion and where people wouldn’t pay they were then falsely accused of crimes they didn’t commit. John openly preaches and teaches against this. Certainly this ethical living and caring for others are signs of the presence of God in our lives. This should shine through all we do as we prepare for Christmas.

Thirdly, is the significance of baptism which is highlighted in this passage from Luke. John makes it clear that while his baptism is important he is not the one God has promised.

John says: “I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, .....He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Vss 16

Suddenly there will be a difference that the one who is to come will make in your lives. It will be noticeable, discernible, practical, spiritual – you will bear the mark of Christ in a real and tangible way. This is who we are waiting for in this Advent season – the one who transforms and turns our life around. Not simply a cute baby in a Bethlehem manger but our Lord and Saviour who John prepares the way for. Hence the “good news” (euangelizo) mentioned in the last verse of this passage is the whole life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ who John heralds in. This is our hope, joy, peace and love that we celebrate with our Advent candles as we prepare for Christmas.

May we use this time to think again of the priorities in life that call us to be followers of Jesus, the one born humbly in a manger so long ago. Amen.

### Prayer

O God we live in a world which pretends that nothing can really change and that things can never be fair. However John the Baptist reminds us that you have promised a different world which offers good news to all in the one who is promised and we are called to be signs of hope to that fact. O God help us to change our ways to your ways so that we can indeed be a guiding light to others in the name of Christ. Amen.