

Sermon Advent 1 Year A

After I had passed all the parts of my course of training for Ministry, Bob took me with a group of others from college on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He went for the archaeology which was amazing, but we both soon got grottoed out! Jingle bells playing over the fields of the shepherds and a giant blow up Santa Claus in Bethlehem square also didn't help!

The part that had the most effect on me spiritually was the Sea of Galilee, in many ways the most unchanged from when our Lord was there, and the Communion service out on the lake was very moving.

I was reminded of this trip by verse 1 from the book of Isaiah. "In the days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it". In the centre of Jerusalem the church is shared, it is a holy place for 3 groups and people from all over the world do stream to it.

Certainly nations are still lifting up the modern equivalent of swords against each other, peace has not yet arrived, but then Christ hasn't yet

come again, and peace is something we should all be working for.

Both the New Testament readings remind us to be ready now, because we don't know when the Son of Man will come again. So rather like Lent, Advent is a time of preparation, a time of repentance, of meditation, of growth; because we are waiting not only to celebrate the time of Christ's birth in human form, but also for the time he comes again.

NT Wright suggests that "The day has already begun to dawn with the coming of Jesus, so Jesus' followers are already people of the day. The promise and warning of God's future is meant to inculcate neither helplessness or complacency, but rather energy to work as day people in a world that thinks it's still night". Later in his writing he says that "We should neither look helplessly at a dark and sleeping world, nor must we think complacently that we, the church, are alright as we are. We must wake people up to the fact that the sun is already shining, and that the judge of the nations is at the door, longing to see his justice and peace enfold the world in a single embrace.

Matthew reminds us that it can be very easy to live our comfortable everyday lives, not sparing much thought about what is happening around us; Noah's neighbours are an example of this, and Mathew warns us that just getting on with our lives or turning our backs at the wrong moment, could be anyone of us.

Matthew and Paul both seem to provide "proper" Advent readings, emphasising the need for preparation, but Isaiah reminds us what it is all for.

There is a vision of the Lord's house restored to its focal position, but also it talks of the people coming towards the holy mountain. They are apparently people who have had enough of war, who have lost their ability to judge whether it is just or not. They long for peace and they want to learn a new way of living, they have learnt the hard way of the cost of wrong choices and now they want teaching.

In the last verse Isaiah's own longing becomes clear, "O house of Jacob, come let *us* walk in the light of the Lord"

Perhaps if we, as God's people, prepare ourselves to walk in his light, then we will make

the way clear for others who are lost and longing. Or is it those who are despairing, desperate and wretched, lead us, who are supposed to be God's people, to his path.

Think of those disciples, who were shown over and over again, about what faith can do in the lives of people, they still struggled with learning the power of God.

During advent we are asked to choose once again, between the easy comfortable world around us and the world where God's great act of redemption through incarnation challenges us. Amongst all the busyness of Christmas preparation we are asked to leave the world for awhile to ensure we are spiritually prepared, that we are ready to choose God and his path and will do so willingly, with love, and will help lead others to the light, to a world of peace and joy with God at the centre.

My soul is waiting for you, O Lord:
in your word is my hope.

**My soul is waiting for you, O Lord:
in your word is my hope.**

There is forgiveness with you,
so that you shall be feared.

In your word is my hope.

Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit.

**My soul is waiting for you, O Lord:
in your word is my hope.**

from Psalm 130