



St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
2nd Sunday of Advent – Sermon for 10.00am 6th December 2020
Bible Readings: Isaiah 40:1-11 & St Mark 1: 1-8
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

A cure-all for post-celebration blues

The beginning of the church's new year is similar to any calendar new year, as it starts with celebration. Last week we had the Advent Carol Service and, for us here at St Andrew's we also celebrated our Patron Saint going out to lunch and a good time was had by all. Today, the 2nd Sunday of Advent, however, brings us back down to earth just like any secular new year, when all the decorations are packed away and people get back to work. Both readings this morning give us the message to take heart but also get stuck in, none more so than St Mark's Gospel. He tells it straight 'the beginning of the Good News.' There are no niceties, as in other gospels of drip-feeding Jesus to us gently through the genealogy of his lineage, instead we are thrust into the theological import of Mark's words, salvation that mankind had been waiting for down the ages has begun!

Telling it straight

Mark's blunt introduction intends that we pay attention. We meet John the Baptist the forerunner prophesied by Isaiah who will prepare the way for the Lord. And John doesn't mince his words with his countrymen and women, if you want to receive salvation then repent now to prepare your hearts in readiness for the Messiah's arrival because when he comes, he will be far more powerful than me. I will baptize you with water to signify your repentance but when he comes, he will baptise with the Holy Spirit. Why did John the Baptist feel the need to give his message to people between the eyeballs? We only need to go back to Isaiah to find out.

There's only one right way of doing things faithfully

Isaiah begins his message gently enough, 'Comfort, O comfort my people says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, she has served her double sentence'. Effectively, he's saying, take heart all you people out in Babylon, God is ready to return you to your homeland, the time is now right to lead you across the desert like shepherding sheep. There the niceties end for Isaiah too cranks up his message 'All people are grass; their constancy withers.' The problem is the people have settled nicely into their temporary home in Babylon, doubtless some have married the locals, they've developed profitable businesses and built lovely houses. Why would anyone want to make a journey across the desert to the wreck that is Jerusalem and have to start all over again? Why, indeed? Well, the inherent danger of living in a foreign country is that they may forget their faith and worship the foreign gods, which are no gods at all being merely the creation of man's hands, made in his image. The danger of that theology is me first, others second. The one true God turns that idiom on its head,

love God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself only in that way will all thrive. That, therefore, is the job of work for the Israelites and they will only learn faithfulness in the Promised Land that God has provided for them.

Heard it all before? Think again!

We could be tempted to say 'Oh yawn!' this comes up every Advent it's all so heaven and hell, death and judgement. Why do we need to hear it again after all that was the Israelites and we are in a different place and a different time? True, but just like the Israelites, year follows year and our lives do not stand still. This year we've had Covid to worry about and its significant on-going ramifications for us and for many. Add into the mix suffering from poor health of a general nature or loss through bereavement and all that before receiving the vaccine and Brexit takes effect and who knows where that will take us? The things that grind us down, grind us inward such that our God who can alleviate our sufferings can seem distant. We begin to doubt that he sees our heartache or hears our prayers, as they appear to go unanswered. It's in times like these that we need to hear again the promises laid down in scripture, to remember that God's sheep have been through many a peak and trough before and not only survived but thrived.

The ultimate Comforter

When God seems distant from us the scriptures show us that if we keep faith, if we repent for the times we falter, redemption comes. God is never absent; we just need to stay awake and watch for his guiding hand to strengthen our resolve and lead us across the deserts of our lives to green pastures. True, we won't be unscathed: Jesus shows us that faithfulness means carrying our cross but through faith we can be changed into his likeness. As the world fast-forwards towards Christmas let us, during Advent, press the pause button. May we find Christ afresh in the scriptures so that our hope and faith revive and thrive, not fearing times to come but trusting God's promises. Advent means 'coming'. Out of love for his creation God has sent his Son to us once before and he will not forsake his faithful, he will come and claim us for his own, therefore, in faith and hope let us pray, 'Come, Lord Jesus come.'

Amen