



**Sunday, 15th December 2019 – Advent 3**  
**Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey**  
**Readings: Isaiah 34: 1-10 and St Matthew 11: 2-11**  
**Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard**

### **Pastimes revisited**

Back in the 1960s and '70s my English grandmother and I shared a sporting passion, the game of snooker. We'd sit glued to the television watching *Pot Black*, as Ted Lowe provided commentary. You may recall that *Pot Black* was first shown in the days when Black and White TVs and Colour TVs equalled each other in number. Did you hear Ted's famous line "For those of you watching in black and white, the pink ball is next to the green." You can't make it up can you!

### **Doubt v certainty**

Back then, in black and white, it was possible to watch a match and understand the gist of the game but it lacked the certainty that colour TV provides. Possibly, John the Baptist locked up in the fortress high in the mountains above the Dead Sea was equally sensing a lack of certainty. John, the free spirit and wilderness-dweller, who told the inconvenient truth, irrespective, to kings, religious leaders and the ordinary people had, by so doing, faithfully prepared the way for Jesus' ministry. For him to be incarcerated in a claustrophobic, dark dungeon must have been a living hell. Was it that which made him send his disciples to Jesus to question whether he was truly the Messiah of whom Isaiah had prophesied? If so, we can readily forgive him given the circumstances. However, it could equally be that John had no doubts and that notwithstanding his situation, he wasn't thinking about himself at all. What if John had actually, been trying to provide certainty for his disciples, for it must have been evident to him that he would never leave prison alive. He would never lead them again. Perhaps, he was selflessly trying to encourage them to follow Jesus and so he sends them to ask a question, to which he knew Jesus would respond in a way that would give them certainty.

### **The Word in action**

Jesus does not disappoint: as always, he is astute in how he responds. He does not try to convince them by words alone but rather he invites them, who knew their scripture, to compare those words with his actions. His answer gives the colour to their black and white question. "Look, the blind receive their sight; the deaf hear; the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed; the dead are raised and the poor in spirit receive good news: in other words, here is the Gospel.

## **Encouragement brings consolation**

Isaiah tried to convey similar in his prophesy to the beleaguered Israelites in exile in Babylon. They had not fled of their own volition but had been deported: they longed for restoration to their homeland. To encourage them Isaiah gives them a prophetic description of that future restoration: the blind will receive their sight, the deaf will hear, the lame will leap. And a highway will be created, a Holy Way, to draw God's people back to the Promised Land the place of covenant and then there will be rejoicing. The way back to Jerusalem for the Israelites was a longed-for aspiration and happen it did, not as a reward for good behaviour but out of God's grace. Our salvation does not come by our own merits but because the will of God enabled his love to be born in a baby to show us the way. And, in his adult ministry, Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophesy in more ways than one, for he not only healed people mentally and physically but also, spiritually for in matters of faith without his insight, we are all, blind, deaf and lame. In responding to John's followers, Jesus gave certainty and his words still speak to us today: look, hear and see the evidence, this is my ministry: I am the way, the truth and the life to salvation.

## **Sunshine after rain**

The Israelites certainly, had their trials over the centuries but the colour of God's love continued to thread its way through their hearts and minds to give them hope. Whereas we may never have been in exile physically but at times in our lives, we all experience trails that can make us feel in exile from living life in all its fulness. For every generation God's refreshing restoration is available if we pray for it. It takes courage to weather the storms of life, to stay with his promises, which is the beauty and value of shared worship, through which we encourage and strengthen each other in faith.

## **Good things come to those who wait**

Through faith our lives are like the season of Advent where we wait for the promises of God to come to fulfilment. Just as we know that each year Advent will be followed by Christmas, we too can have certainty in our lives, that the threat of death is transformed by the coming of Christ, for as Isaiah says, "He will come and save you." Not maybe, not if he feels like it but he will come again. Christ's birth was the promise, his resurrection the assurance and his ascension, which bridged earth and heaven, gives certainty that good things do come to those who wait, faithfully.

Amen.