



St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Sunday, 11 December 2022 – Advent 3
Readings: Isaiah 35: 1-10 and St Matthew 11: 2-11
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

In the lesson that Michael read to us, Isaiah prophesies 'A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way.' This is a road of direct access, no meandering, no road closures, no diversions but a straight road on God's highway! Living in Guernsey, as we do with multiple road closures and diversions throughout the year, we can empathise with the thought of no impediment to our journeys.

Isaiah's message was exactly what the exiled Israelites languishing in Babylon had been longing to hear. They had served their time of penitence but their fear was that their path home would be circuitous like that of their ancestors who, on leaving Egypt, spent forty years wandering in the wilderness. Not so says Isaiah, it will be a home run and there will be everlasting joy and gladness, sorrow and sighing will flee away. No wonder Isaiah told them to 'Rejoice!' The only caveat, being that it does require the pilgrim to use the highway provided and not go off at a tangent without the support that God is offering. So, how do we apply this message to our lives in a more fundamental way than the mere frustration of negotiating road closures?

We all have those periods in our lives when ordinary activities are put on hold, this may be through illness, bereavement, unemployment or, as in Jersey, unexpected tragedy. Such circumstances can unsettle our faith. In those times we seem to trudge around on an endless circuit of diversions: we seek comfort and hope, but the search for that can be challenging, as our emotions are raw making us over-sensitive to remarks. This is exactly the situation in which John the Baptist found himself. He had been a faithful forerunner for the Messiah, preparing the way in the thorny wilderness of peoples' faith but then he was imprisoned by Herod. His faith felt besieged to the extent that he wondered if he'd been mistaken in identifying Jesus as the Messiah. So, he sent his followers to Jesus, to seek clarification.

Jesus' response to the followers may at first seem curious, as he rounded off his comments with 'Blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me!' Jesus fully understood John's state of mind in his imprisonment. He, therefore, anticipated John's reaction when his followers hot-footed it back, so Jesus aimed to provide comfort. Imagine John's followers busting a gut to pass on Jesus' message "He said to tell you that the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are healed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news!" John might then have felt

an idiot, had the message stopped there, after all John would have reasoned what person could do all that other than the Messiah? Fortunately, they completed the message "Jesus also said to tell you, 'Blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me!'" Ah! Now John knows, Jesus understands him and so he is blessed.

We all know what it's like, when someone takes the hump at what we say. Sometimes it's inadvertent with no attempt to be rude. Or, at other times we may think someone has taken offence by what we've said, when in point of fact they were distracted about another issue and were not focusing on our words at all. In moments like these we need self-awareness to discern that we may have misread the body language or, to apologise if we really did offend. There is no harm in defending our principles, Jesus certainly did, however, he did so, with grace. Of course, that did not stop people taking umbrage and failing to see in Jesus, Isaiah's long-prophesied Messiah.

As we continue our Advent journey on the Holy Way towards the Word made flesh and living among us, we too are urged to take no offence at Jesus. To see beyond our immediate problems, though they may be life-challenging and, see in him the friend we need to help us through the wilderness times of our lives to guide us into deeper and abiding faith. The direct way of gaining this help is akin to being a permanent learner driver, it takes perseverance coupled with patience and prayer. Though we may stall and have a few scrapes, if we keep talking to Jesus, he'll help us to get back on the right path to move forward in faith. Then, down the years when looking back, we will see how far we've travelled forwards on the Holy Way and be able to give thanks, even to rejoice: then, we will be blessed indeed. Amen.