

ADVENT 2 A 07/8

One of the central characters of ADVENT is of course the rustic figure of John the Baptist. The brief description we get of him heightens our sense of the “rustic” : [Matthew 3:4 (NRSV)]

4 Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

[1] <#_ftn1>

And his appearance would have been strongly affected by his “rough living” in the very arid lands of the Jordan wilderness – a very hot, arid land.

During Advent we are invited to join John’s audience, invited to join in a period of preparation, not just preparation for our celebration of Christmas, but a preparation for the time when “CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN”

Within the proclamation of the Baptist is the theme of JUDGEMENT, I wonder what sort of picture that creates in your imagination?

Perhaps a severe figure, dressed in black, sitting behind a rich mahogany bench, gavel in hand, ready to pronounce a sentence, condemning the recipient to a long term in prison.

But in biblical terms judgement is not about the delivering of a verdict, it is about the deliverance of a people: God’s people. It is all about setting wrongs right. As we hear the words of the prophet Isaiah today, we might also think of the words that startled the congregation in the synagogue at Nazareth: Luke 4:18 (NRSV)

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

God's judgement is Good News – for all who are faithful followers of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

As I said earlier, during Advent we are invited to join John's audience, invited to join in a period of preparation, not just preparation for our celebration of Christmas, but a preparation for the time when "CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN". It is what we might call the "in between time": i.e. that time between Jesus' resurrection and the end of this present age.

A big difference for us over the Baptist's audience is that we are already gifted with the presence of Christ among us. This presence is a challenge because it challenges us with the question: "Does the 'presence of Christ' influence our lives in any real and effective way?"

As an example of how the 'presence of Christ' can influence lives we would do well to look at the person of William Wilberforce – the great opponent of the slave trade – the abolition of which was legislated in the British Parliament 200 years ago in 1807.

The W.A. Anglican teacher John Watson writes: "Politics is an area of anxiety for most people. Even in a democracy we know that the worst power grabbers and place seekers get to the top. The good men leave politics or give up. But William Wilberforce was a politician under God and his life shows that a Christian politician can radically change the time in which he lives." W.W. achieved his goals through the steadfastness of faith and the conviction that his cause was godly and just. He stood up against incredible political and commercial opposition, as well as not always enjoying the support of the established Church.

John the Baptist also was a man of faith and great integrity: he stuck to his mission and that ended up costing him his head.

“Does the ‘presence of Christ’ influence our lives in any real and effective way?”

Each one of us has to address that question for ourselves; but living out our Christian vocation is never done in a vacuum, we are part of the people of God, bound together into that mystical fellowship we call “the body of Christ” in which we experience fellowship not only with one another but also with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

William Wilberforce was actively supported during his long and arduous campaign by the fellowship of both political and Christian supporters.

John the Baptist was supported by his small band of disciples who encouraged him right up to the end of his life and [Mark 6:29 (NRSV)] 29
When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

So, we are challenged to “Prepare the way of the Lord” – by not only to celebrate Christ’s birth in a godly way, but also we are challenged to prepare for that day when Christ will come again by living thorough going Christian lives seeking God’s peace and justice as realities for the world in which we live.

So that: Isaiah 11:6-9 (NRSV)

6 The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.

7 The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

9 They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

[1] <#_ftnref1> The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version. 1996, c1989. Thomas Nelson: Nashville