

Sermon for the 3rd Sunday of Advent- 'Advent for all!' Neville

Our Diocesan Newsletter for December, 'The Communicant' had this message from the Editor

"A member of the Diocese summed it up perfectly recently: with all the anguish and desolation of this year the world is crying out for a way of recognising that the leadup to Christmas 2020 will be a time for thinking about what we are lacking, what we have lost, and what we long for in the future...thankfully the Church already has something for that – it's called ADVENT! "

Lucky-old Church!

The comment wasn't meant to stick in the craw but it stuck in mine. It generated the notion that Advent was a prop; an add on; that all we had to do was negotiate another turn of the liturgical cycle and all would be well. Advent is rather a state of heart and mind.

There are things that need changing in us as individuals and as a body, the church, but we're supposed to be a force for change, making the world 'fit for purpose'- the creator's purpose.

A spirit-filled church would be standing shoulder –to-shoulder with Isaiah and proclaiming to our wilderness-of-a-world those inspiring words from Is. 61 v 1-4

We are anointed to bring good news to the afflicted - not simply tabloid tales that raise hope for a day nor broadsheet essays that reassure overnight but – as we are reminded on this 3rd Sunday - the prospect of EVERLASTING JOY; something that can be felt, shared, lived NOW.

We have to bare our arms and receive the anointing balm. The much-heralded Covid vaccines offer us 'light at the END of the tunnel'.

The anointing spirit offers us light in the middle the tunnel of life, making it a TUNNEL OF LOVE!

Our Gospel for today introduces once more to the familiar figure of John the Baptist.

At first glance - John and Joy- don't seem to be natural bedfellows: There were 'norra, lorra laffs' heard on the banks of the river Jordan!

But a second glance at a man agonizing over the plight of the world around him, sensing that a solution was imminent and needed nothing that every man and woman could not bring to the table, can bring us closer to joy.

Kahlil Gibran said Joy is your sorrow unmasked. The man who John was preparing a way for and whose birth we prepare to celebrate, was a harbinger of joy, but also a 'man of sorrows and acquainted with grief'.

In acquainting ourselves with the sorrows and grief of those for whom life is currently a wilderness experience, mutual joy is to be found.

Joy does not come cheaply or easily: its not just a question of negotiating another liturgical cycle and all will be well- acquiring our umpteenth Advent T shirt.

It requires a disciplined openness to the Spirit's balm: not an injection today and booster jab after a few weeks; two injections of Covid vaccine will prime our T cells to recognize a alien agent entering our bodies: the Advent balm primes our 'L cells': those that sense something is amiss in others give us all the capacity to love and heal.

Joy is unbounded freedom.

To quote Kahlil Gibran again

"You shall be free indeed when your days are not without a care nor your nights without a want and grief-

but rather when these things girdle your life and yet you rise above them naked and unbound"

This was no doubt the experience of those immersed in the Jordan by John as they rose from the waters, wiped open their eyes and vowed to change the direction of their lives.

One man did just that and our table this morning represents the fruits of his labours.

But what do we bring to that table and what will we take from it?
Not just an awareness of our shortcomings and determination that they are fewer in number before we reach Advent's 4th Sunday!

We have the opportunity to carry the light of Christ into our oft darkened world; to be light at the entrance to others' tunnels; to spread love like a beneficent virus.

For this is the divine purpose: this is the blueprint, the 'Word' that was there when it all started, a blueprint personified by Jesus and in the DNA of each and everyone of us.

Richard Rohr of the Centre for Action and Contemplation is a Franciscan and says that Franciscans look upon the creation as the first coming of Christ and the birth of Christ as a second coming.

"In the beginning was the word----and the word dwelt among us"
In that view, each day becomes one in which Christ can be reborn in us. To use an analogy of John of The Cross (a 16th Century mystic), we are like the dusty stained glass windows of a church; wipe them clean and the passing light will reveal their true full colour.

As we progress through Advent, we have an opportunity to remove the grime that our daily routines deposit and let the true light of Christ pass through us to be seen by all. That way Advent becomes an asset and blessing for all, not just the church.