

4th December 2020

Dear Friends,

Once again how are you, I hope that you are doing well as we move through this very different advent time, as I sit and write this morning it is snowing outside, and the usual view of the city from my office window is obscured. I must admit I am one of those people who loves snow and enjoys seeing the world turn white, it always seems magical somehow. Last night the people in my street took part in the Sheffield Carols initiative to get us all out on our doorsteps singing, we began with The First Noel, and it began to snow then, several people had come out with candle lit lanterns and there was a sense of fellowship and hope amongst us, in many ways we have been more connected as neighbours this year, one of the strange blessings that Covid-19 has brought to us.

I wonder what blessings you have seen in this pandemic year, or how you might have been blessed by it? I realise that amidst all of the difficulties that may seem like a strange question to ask, and I know for many this has been a struggle, but I hope that there are also things that we have learned and will want to hold onto. I have noticed people's openness and generosity, I talked about the foodbank last week and how people have been generous there, both local businesses and individuals. For me, a sign of hope was being able to go to my youngest son's wedding, it was strange but beautiful, with 15 socially distanced people wearing masks, but we were able to celebrate with Jon and Ellie, and were reminded that love overcomes!

As we move through advent we are reminded that we are not only preparing for Christmas, but also continuing to prepare for that day when God will make all things new, and that we are called to live into that even now, The Gospel reading set for this Sunday focuses on John the Baptist who comes to prepare the way for Jesus;

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight" ',

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.' (Mark 1:1-8)

There is one who is coming! Imagine if you can the anticipation, imagine not knowing the story of Jesus and the longing that was present in the hearts of those who had been waiting for so long. Now imagine John, this wild strange character calling people to prepare, to turn towards the light, and to look forward to the one who was about to come among them and baptise them with the Holy Spirit!

What a promise, hope was just over the horizon, hope was coming, hope was almost but not quite realised, and people were hungry for hope, and crowds came out to be baptised by John so that they would be prepared for the coming Messiah.

Of course we know how the story plays out, we know that the Messiah did not fit many peoples expectations, and that there was confusion and disappointment, and yet, we still tell the story today because it is so full of hope, so full of promise, so full of possibilities!

We still tell the story today and it has power that brings it to life over and over again, and can somehow work its divine magic in our lives as we are invited into it, and to play our part in it, for the miracle that God chooses to work in, with and through those who are willing to walk and work with Them (Creator, Son, Spirit) has not changed!

We are called to be those who are preparing, to be those who bring the kin(g)dom to earth bit by bit by living out the Gospel values, by imitating the ways of Christ, by welcoming the outcast and stranger, by helping the lame to walk and the blind to see. Just ponder for a moment how a loving act or a kind word might open someone's eyes to the possibility that God is among us. That the divine is living and active even through a global pandemic, and that holy possibilities can be brought to life in you and in me! So, in this season of advent I encourage you to turn some time every day over to focusing on the impossible made possible, that God took on human flesh and made his dwelling among us, and even more amazing that because of this the divine life can come to life in our lives, but of course it is up to us to choose to receive it and to live it! I leave you to ponder how, and with the words of a hymn:

Hear the call of the kingdom
Lift your eyes to the King
Let His song rise within you
As a fragrant offering
Of how God rich in mercy
Came in Christ to redeem
All who trust in His unfailing grace

Hear the call of the Kingdom
To be children of light
With the mercy of heaven
The humility of Christ
Walking justly before Him
Loving all that is right

That the life of Christ may shine through us

King of Heaven we will answer the call
We will follow bringing hope to the world
Filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim
Salvation in Jesus' name

Hear the call of the Kingdom
To reach out to the lost
With the Father's compassion
In the wonder of the cross
Bringing peace and forgiveness
And a hope yet to come
Let the nations put their trust in Him

The call of the kingdom echoed through John the Baptists cry just as it had through the prophets before him, the call of the kingdom has continued to echo down through the ages, through ordinary and extraordinary people. The call will continue until all things are made new and Christ comes again. There is hope, and hope will prevail.

So, look for hope, be bringers of hope, celebrate hope when you find it, and hold to the faith, for ALL WILL BE WELL! Of course, one great hope at this time is that the Covid-19 vaccine will be effective and will be readily available, we pray for all of those involved in this including the scientists, the medics and those responsible for distribution. We pray to that this will be available for all nations, and all people.

I wish you many blessings as we continue through this advent time, may you be blessed even on difficult days, may you bless others as you allow the kingdom to shine in your life.

Take care, and if you want to talk to be just give me a call or drop me an email,

Peace and blessings



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