

Sermon: Advent 2 December 8th 2019

Isaiah 11: 1-10, Psalm 72, Romans 15:4-13 Matthew 3: 1-12

Waiting for God.

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

What a promise! How the Israelites must have looked forward to the day of fulfillment on this prophesy! Their decimated armies and reduced population after so much war and invasion must have rejoiced at this essence, this stump of their former glory being restored - a Messiah was coming, a Saviour, a warrior, to rescue them from all their woes and make them mighty again! Little did they know the waiting time was about 680 years! The psalm from David was around 300 years before that! Waiting for God. All those years of waiting!

Now those of you who know me, know that I am most impatient. If you tell me I have to wait longer than I think is necessary, I go into meltdown! If the life of the nation depended on a messiah coming, then 680 years is a tad long. BUT God looks after them in the waiting, just as

he is looking after us now, waiting for the second coming of our messiah!

Things don't happen in our time, they happen in Gods time, the perfect time. We are not waiting for our Messiah to be born on earth, he already has been; we are waiting to celebrate his inaccurate birthday, we await the second coming, and our job is to show people the way to salvation, just like John the Baptist was doing.

John' message (our message) isn't an easy one. "Choose" says John – choose to repent and be baptised or choose to perish. And don't think you can hedge your bets by being baptised but not really changing anything else about your life. The Sadducees and Pharisees who came with no mention of repentance, made John really angry. "Who warned you to flee from the wrath that is to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance".

Of all the characters we might find on our Christmas cards – Mary, Joseph, Shepherds, angels... imagine getting a card of John the Baptist looking wild & woolly and saying 'Merry Christmas you brood of vipers. Now repent'. Not available in all good card shops anytime soon.

It might seem that John – with his blood and thunder message, is out of step with the peaceful message of Christmas, but John's role is to tell the world about the coming of the Messiah – to declare the way of the Lord. Now is the time when all people must make a choice. John says "He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather the wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

So in Advent maybe we need to be in our own little wilderness – working things out, talking to God, getting our lives straight, because we have been offered the chance to turn, to repent and to follow Jesus. But our repentance, our turning round our lives in order to follow Jesus, also involves seeing the world in a new way and this comes with a struggle.

John cried out in the wilderness. And that is where we need to be in advent. A place where we are a little confused, and trying to work out our salvation, spending time with God and waiting for God to speak to us. Waiting on Him.

Advent begins with an honest, wilderness-style reckoning with sin, where we evaluate our lives and what we do with them. We can't get to the

manger unless we go through John's message, and John is all about repentance.

But is this a sort of blessing? Maybe, if we can get past our baggage and follow John out into the wilderness, we will find comfort in the fact that something more profound is at stake in our souls than, "I make mistakes sometimes," or "I've got a few issues." What ails is something deeper, grimmer, and far more consequential.

Where is God working in you, and what will it take for you to participate in that uncomfortable but essential work of pointing others towards Jesus? John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, and people stream to him there, hungry and ready. Maybe in our wilderness of waiting and prayer we stream there, too, and others may stream to us. Like John, may we become brave voices in hard places, preparing the way of the Lord.

We don't have to wait for Christmas, we just have to wait for God and discover what He will do in us to make his kingdom come.