



ADVENT 2

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December 06, 2020
Anglican Parish of Raymond Terrace
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Pray:

May I speak to you in the name of GOD – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen



The book of Isaiah makes a dramatic shift at this point. The chapters following discuss the majesty of GOD, who is coming to rule the earth and judge all the people. GOD will reunite Israel and Judah and restore them to glory. Instead of warning the people of impending judgement, Isaiah here comforts them. Chapter 40 refers to restoration after the exile – it looks to the end of time when Babylon – the future evil world system – will be destroyed and the persecution of GOD’s people will end. Judah still had 100 years of trouble before Jerusalem would fall – then 70 years of exile. So GOD tells Isaiah to speak tenderly and to comfort Jerusalem. The seeds of comfort may take root in the soil of adversity. When our lives seem to be falling apart, we should ask GOD to comfort us. We may not escape adversity, but we may

find GOD's comfort as we face it. Sometimes, the only comfort we have is in the knowledge that someday we will be with GOD. We must appreciate the comfort and encouragement found in His Word, His presence and His people.

Preparing a straight highway means removing obstacles and rolling out the red carpet for the coming of the LORD. The desert is a picture of life's trials and sufferings. We are not immune to these, but our faith need not be hindered by them. Isaiah told the people to prepare to see GOD work. John the Baptist used these words as he challenged the people to prepare for the coming Messiah.

People are compared here to grass and flowers that wither away. We are mortal – but GOD's Word is eternal and unfailing. Public opinion changes and is unreliable – but GOD's Word is constant. Only in GOD's eternal Word will we find lasting solutions to our problems and needs.

GOD is often pictured as a shepherd, gently caring for and guiding His flock. He is powerful, yet careful and gentle. He is called a shepherd¹, the good shepherd², the great shepherd³ and the Chief Shepherd⁴. Note that the Shepherd is caring for the most defenceless members of His society – children and those caring for them. This reinforces the prophetic theme that the truly powerful nation is not the one with the strong military, but rather the one that relies on GOD's caring strength.

The theme of Psalm 85 is from Reverence to Restoration. Reverence leads to forgiveness, restoring our love and joy for GOD. The writer was asking GOD to revive His people, bringing them back to a spiritual life. GOD is capable of reviving both churches and individuals. He can pour out His love on us, renewing our love for Him. When we need revival in any area of

¹ Psalm 23

² John 10:11, 14

³ Hebrews 13:20

⁴ 1 Peter 5:4

our lives, we need to ask GOD to give us a fresh touch of His love.

As the writer cries out for GOD's intervention, he can almost see, taste, and hear GOD's response. These 5 verses describe what GOD can do for those who welcome his call – be righteous. This psalm illustrates that the greater the presence of righteousness – or obedience to GOD – the clearer the examples of GOD's blessings. The principle works equally in the life of a nation or an individual. The more we seek GOD's righteousness and His kingdom, as JESUS pointed out, the more we will see everything else taken care of by GOD.

In his second letter, Peter points out that GOD may have seemed slow to these believers as they faced persecution every day and longed to be delivered. But GOD is not slow – He just is NOT on our timetable. ^ JESUS is waiting so that more sinners will repent and turn to Him. We must not sit and wait for CHRIST to return – but we should live with the realisation that time

is short and that we have important work to do. We need to be ready to meet CHRIST any time – even today – yet plan our course of service as though He may not return for many years.

The day of the LORD is the day of GOD's judgement on the earth. Here, it is used in reference to CHRIST's return. CHRIST's second coming will be sudden and terrible for those who do not believe in Him. But if we are morally clean and spiritually alert, it won't come as a surprise. Realising that the earth is going to be burned up, we should put our confidence in what is lasting and eternal and not be bound to earth and its treasures or pursuits. Trusting in GOD brings us peace.

GOD's purpose for people is not destruction but re-creation. GOD will purify the heavens and earth with fire – then He will create them anew. We can joyously look forward to the restoration of GOD's good world.

▲The first line in our Gospel passage for today is: **¹The beginning of the good news* of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.** Mark is telling us that what follows is the Good

News about JESUS CHRIST the Messiah and the Son of GOD. We are about to embark on a glorious adventure. But first, we need to hear what we must do to get ready. Why does Mark quote from the prophet Isaiah before he begins to write about John the Baptist? What is Mark trying to tell us by associating John with Isaiah?

Isaiah is arguably one of the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. He lived long before JESUS and John. His prophecies prepared people for the coming of a Saviour. So, in a sense, he was getting people ready for JESUS' coming before John did. Prophets typically called their attention to people's failings, to the things they needed to work on. But they also spread hope that the people will be delivered from the hardships they might be experiencing.

Throughout all the Gospels, the writers want us to understand that everything that happened through JESUS and to JESUS was foretold – even before JESUS began His ministry with the testimony of John the Baptist.

John is the “messenger” – the “voice” of one crying out in the wilderness to announce the coming of the Messiah – JESUS of Nazareth. John preached a baptism of repentance. When John immersed the person wishing to receive this baptism under the waters of the Jordan River and then brought them to the surface again, the person had symbolically died to a way of life that was darkened by sin. He or she was resolving to live a different way. That different way – a life as a child of GOD – would not be possible until JESUS established the sacrament of Baptism through His life, death and Resurrection. Many of those who received John’s baptism would, in time, come to receive Christian baptism as well – just as Faith and Alana will when I baptise them at 11:30am tomorrow/today. Due to COVID and the number of people who have been invited to attend, we will be conducting the baptism outside so that physical distancing can be practised.

Whilst I thought about it, I can assure everybody that I will not be wearing camel’s hair vestments or having

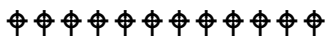
locusts and wild honey for breakfast. This description of John's clothing and diet clearly separates him from most of his contemporaries – and is a sign of his unique calling. He is considered the last prophet of the Old Testament. A quick look at the backgrounds and personalities of some of the Old Testament prophets – including Isaiah – will show that in one way or another, each of them was “different. The prophet was a person called by GOD to tell it like it really was. For that reason, sometimes they were controversial people. How is JESUS calling you to be a witness for Him in the world this week?



Fr Michael Goonan, of the Society of St Paul's in Australia, summarises our gospel this way:

“Spiritual writers speak of the journey we must take with GOD. The point is valid but there is a danger that we may think that GOD is stationary somewhere and we must journey to Him – that it's all up to us. No, our relationship with GOD is far more dynamic and GOD is

always journeying towards us, searching for us, calling out to us by name as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden. The season of Advent prepares us to celebrate GOD's coming to us as a Babe at Bethlehem and encourages us to look forward to CHRIST's final coming in glory. What we are called to do is to "prepare a way for the LORD" to come to us. And what is that way? ^Well, today's psalm says: **For righteousness shall go before him: and tread the path before his feet.** To prepare the way, we need to act with righteousness and to promote justice – both in our personal lives and globally. Today's passage from Isaiah captures beautifully the longing of GOD to be united with us: "He is like a shepherd leading his flock, gathering the lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast, and leading to their rest the mother ewes. Try and imagine yourself being held in the loving arms of GOD and leaning against his breast. That is the kind of intimacy GOD desires with us.



May we pray:

In your plan of salvation, O GOD, you have sent John the Baptist to call us to repentance for our sins. Grant that we be sincere in our repentance and strive to live in communion with your beloved Son, the Word made flesh, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one GOD, for ever and ever. Amen

Life Application Study Bible

Daily Prayer 2020

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