

Second Sunday of Advent
06-12-2020
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Isaiah 40: 1-11 Prepare the way of the Lord

Psalms 85: 1-2, 8-13 The Lord's salvation is near to those who fear Him.

2 Peter 3: 8-15a The Lord is patient and loving,
but a new Heaven and Earth will come.

Mark 1: 1-8 Ministry of John the Baptist - "Prepare the way of the Lord."

Introduction

This morning I'd like to focus on the words from our sentence –
Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. For the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all peoples shall see it together.
These words are originally from the Old Testament Prophet Isaiah in the reading we have heard this morning. They must have held a great deal of significance for the early Christians, because they are quoted, in differing lengths in each one of the 4 Gospels. And in each Gospel these words are focused on the work of John the Baptist.

Coming Kingdom

Let's begin by looking at the second sentence.

"For the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all peoples shall see it together."

The Glory of the Lord being revealed is clearly about the Kingdom of Heaven. As we journeyed through Matthew's Gospel this year, in the lead up to Advent, we looked a lot, at the Kingdom of Heaven. Especially in the teaching of Jesus, we have heard during a number of weeks of him telling parables, which begin in this way:-

"The kingdom of Heaven is like.....and then the parable proceeds"

We have also seen that there is a tension we must hold in what we know about the Kingdom of Heaven.

In one sense it is here now. Jesus became a human being. He died on the cross for us and rose again. He is alive and we have access to God the Father through him, right Now, if we chose to accept Him into our lives.

In another sense though, the Kingdom of Heaven is also in the future. Whilst Jesus is with us now, He will also come again, at the second coming, and as we say in the creeds –

"He will come to Judge the living and the dead."

So for us in practical terms as we look at God being revealed, we know that He has fully revealed Himself to us in the person and work of Jesus, and yet we await the second coming.

To summarize, it is like what we have heard in the reading from Peter's letter today –

“The Lord is patient and loving and wants all to come to Him, But a new heaven and earth is coming.”

Preparing the Way of the Lord

And now let's look at how we might prepare for this new Heaven and Earth by looking at the first part of the sentence.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

When Isaiah originally wrote this he was anticipating Israel's return from exile in Babylon back to the Promised Land. In those days it was probably necessary to actually make paths through the desert for them to return to Israel.

We know how John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord. He stood out in the desert and called people to repentance and he baptised them. He also only wore clothes of camel hair, and ate locusts and honey.

Now I can see myself calling people to repentance and I'm very happy to baptise them, but I'm not so sure on living a solitary life in the desert, or only wearing clothes of camel's hair or eating Locusts.

And as I look around this morning I'm not so sure any of you could particularly see yourselves Living a solitary life in the desert, eating Locusts and wearing only Camels hair. We, that is you and I, are not Isaiah and we are not John the Baptist. But as Christians we are all called to -

Prepare the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight.

We need to remove whatever obstacles there are in our lives and roll out the red carpet for Jesus to enter in. And we need to not only be concerned with how he enters our lives, but how we help others into that same experience.

Example

I'd like to look at some of the means by which we might achieve this, but first I'd like to share with you an experience I had with a lady who seemed to be “Preparing the way of the Lord”.

When I was an Assistant Curate in Brisbane I recall visiting one of our parishioners who had gone to live in a Nursing Home. Her body was giving way but her mind was still sharp. We prayed together and she probably did more of the praying than me. She gave thanks for What Jesus did for her

at Calvary. She prayed for Dennis the Rector, she prayed for my ministry, she prayed for the Parish, she prayed for the Sunday School, which she had still been helping out in into her 90's. Grace really wanted to prepare the Way for Jesus to come into the lives of others.

That's an example, and like Isaiah and John the Baptist, others can inspire us, but each of us are different and we all need to respond to Jesus in our own way.

Means to be prepared

It seems to me the best way to maintain our relationship with God, and be preparing for his coming, is by being connected to, and in tune with God.

Last week we looked at the importance of prayer, reading the scriptures and worshipping together, as the way we are moulded by God.

I purposely talked about prayer and scripture on a daily basis, as to prepare for Jesus' return we must be in relationship with him. If I said to Leeza that I told her I loved her when we got married, so I don't really have to pay any attention to her any more, I'm not quite sure how long our relationship would last. Just like we need to work on our human relationships, we need to work on our relationship with God, if we are to Prepare his Way.

And today we are reminded that the first step in our relationship with God is repentance. Repentance may not seem a very attractive proposition to bring people to faith in God. No one wants to be told they've done something wrong. As I've said before, If I walked up to a stranger in the street and said "G'day mate, do you know that you're a sinner?" I probably wouldn't get a great reception. But that is the reality for us as human beings. And if we understand that reality, then we can truly grasp why the message of Jesus is such "Good News". Because if we repent, we can be assured of forgiveness and be secure in our relationship with God.

Conclusion

So in conclusion, today in this Advent season, as we prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus into the world as an infant. I pray that we will all continue, each in our own way, to prepare the way of the Lord and make his paths straight, as we live with the expectation of his return. Amen.