

## **Sermon for Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2022**

### **The Second Sunday of Advent Fr. John Reed**

I speak in the name of the living God who is Creator, Redeemer and Life giver.

On Friday it was time to take Socks to Vets in the waiting room were 3 dogs and a Cat in a pet carrier. Most dogs are Ok with other dogs, but not Socks she likes to share her space with humans. So I had to find an area away from curious dogs anxious to sniff new comers. And if Socks had seen what was meowing in the Pet carrier she would in no uncertain terms have wanted to see the Cat off the premises.

So wolves living with lambs, leopards lying down with goats, Calves, sheep and lions together led by a small child. Cows and bears grazing with there young lying down together. And toddlers playing safely with poisonous snakes takes a huge jump of the imagination.

In the midst of warring nations Isaiah promises a future where Gods reign will engulf the earth putting an end to conflict and suffering. The knowledge of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. It's the prayer humanity has had on its lips since time immemorial – no more war, no more suffering. The weak no longer being the prey of the strong. All this will come from a shoot or a sprig from the stump of the house of David. A child who will embody the coming Kingdom of God for humanity.

St. Paul wrote to the Church in Rome these words of encouragement Christ came into the world to welcome people who were excluded by birth from being part of Gods people, to bring all of humanity into harmony with each other. Jews, Greeks, Romans, barbarians from Roman occupied Europe, people from Africa and others- they were all there. We may think we would like to welcome Christ as our guest, but in reality he welcomes us into the great big reality of Gods kingdom. In Christ through our baptism, and the indwelling of Gods Spirit we are welcomed. The narratives in Scripture are not addressed to individuals, God speaks through Christ to whole peoples.

We are welcomed in order to welcome others as apprentices of Christ. As we live together in Christ we do not always get it right, the world is not always as simple as we would like it to be. That is where forgiveness is important. A chaplain in Alder Hey recounted this story; a parent of a very sick child asked the Chaplain; “ How much does God love me?”

Before the chaplain could reply the child stretched out her arms as fully as she could and said; “this much.” The child was mimicking Jesus with outstretched arms on the cross. That is the example we hold above all others, the one we seek to emulate as followers of Jesus. “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

John the Baptist speaks in the waste lands of the Sinai desert, by the river Jordan where the children of Israel entered the promised land. He speaks to the professionals of the organised faith in Jerusalem in uncompromising terms. They were the religious experts who thought they knew everything about God, coming out from the Temple to put this eccentric prophet right. They had the family connections and over a thousand years of family history they could recite.

And the message of John to them and to all of us now. Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. Repenting means you might have been resolutely going one way in your heart and mind, but faced with the truth we see in Jesus its time to take another way that will make you want to turn your back on all that has gone before. Gods Kingdom is in your midst, its here. The time to respond is now. It’s a kingdom that shouts inclusion, where the strong, the successful and the weak and those we see in need of help all are welcomed as children of God.

John the Baptist uses the image of fire in his words to the Pharisees; the fire of the furnace that cleanses and purifies. The huge blast furnace that was demolished in Redcar recently for years to imperfect iron mixed in rocks and limestone, heating it to separate pure metal from slag. The second picture was the winnowing fork that lifts the grain and the chaff into the air, the pure grain falls and the chaff is blown away and burned on a fire. The love of Christ is a fire that cleanses, a wind that separates and purifies.

There are no half ways or maybe’s with John the Baptist as he points the way to the one in whom everyone is welcome. Its like a tapestry; you and I are threads in an big picture. At the centre is the image of Jesus, all threads add to that picture. A dropped thread or an imperfect stitch is always welcomed. The presence of Jesus ensures that imperfections in the bigger picture will with others become part of a perfect picture- The Kingdom of God here and now.