

7 December 2014 First Sunday in Advent

Isaiah 40: 1-11

Psalm 85: 1-2, 8-13

2 Peter 3: 8-15

Mark 1:1-8

[Advent 2B Dec 7, 2014 Text week](#)

The second Sunday of Advent and we hear in the words of Isaiah the call to “prepare the way of the Lord”; it is a call picked up by Mark in the opening verses of Mark’s gospel and this time it is used to introduce John the Baptist...

As Mark is writing for a gentile (non-jewish) audience he has no need to invent a story that will portray Jesus as the expected Messiah, however he still draws on the traditional authority, the Hebrew Scriptures, and the words of the prophet Isaiah in order to give authority to his writing.

Because we have access to the other gospels, we almost can’t help reading today’s old testament and gospel readings with an understanding that we are being called to “prepare the way” for Christmas. And that is obviously not the understanding (or insight) being offered as neither Isaiah nor Mark have ‘Christmas’ as a reference point.

So we need to contemplate further and consider what these readings are really proclaiming, “prepare the way” for what?

Before we look at them further, let’s look at the reading that sits in between the Old Testament and gospel, the reading from 2 Peter, one of the last letters included in the New Testament canon. It begins with a delightful echo of the sonnet by John Donne that some of us looked at on Wednesday evening: “*one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day*”.

Peter, or the writer of 2 Peter, invites us into a deeper appreciation of ‘time’; and in turn that invites us into a very different appreciation of everything.

If we only see the world measured out by the ticking of a clock, and blocks of 24 hours that line up in sets of seven to make weeks, that then line up in 52s to make years etc. etc.; then we will only appreciate a world that is shaped by our mortality, and our behaviour, our ‘living’ will in turn be shaped by that understanding.

We will grab whatever we can in the time allotted

We will make provision for ourselves, ensuring sufficiency for our life-expectancy

We will insure ourselves against glitches in the program

And we will retain a fear of the end of our time allotment; just as primitive humanity feared the end of the earth at the horizon when they then held a worldview understanding a flat earth.

2

2 Peter however speaks of another understanding: “*one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day*”; does that suggest a glimpse of eternity?

Is the text asking us to look beyond the everyday into the moment of all time?

As the letter continues to explore ‘the one fact that we should not ignore’ it comes to a crucial question; “*what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness*”?

What do we need to be, or how do we need to live, as “*we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home*”? Are we being encouraged to discover ourselves, and each other, as made in the image of God?

In this letter are we discovering the ‘preparation’ that is being proclaimed in Isaiah’s “prepare the way of the Lord”; for Isaiah also speaks of ‘a new creation’; “*Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.*”

Isaiah’s ‘new creation’ is presented as a vision of tomorrow whereby “*the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together*”.

Isaiah obviously knew that his first audience would have difficulty with the vision of new creation that is not determined by the clock, so we have a naming of the difficulty in verse eight; “*The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.*” That first audience would have seen in the ‘grass’ and the ‘flower’ their own mortality; however Isaiah introduces the reality of the “word of God”, that which is eternal.

It is important to appreciate that what is being illuminated in the first reading is two different realities.... And the reality of Isaiah’s vision is very much affirmed by his proclaiming “here God[he] is”.

Isaiah precedes his declaration of a new reality with “*do not fear*”; the very same comfort that is given by the angels as they announce a new creation in the nativity narratives of Matthew and Luke.

That same vision, or glimpse of a new creation, is the same as Mark proclaims in his gospel, and for Mark the vision is both more fully revealed, and realized through Christ.

These second Sunday of Advent readings are inviting us beyond the confines of our own mortality, beyond the fears that keep us imprisoned in the everyday; and into the possibility and potential of “*here God is*”.

We are being encouraged to prepare, make ready and engage in activity that will make real “*new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.*”

Between now and Christmas we might more fully heed the voice of the prophet, the comfort of the angel and look to that star, that heavenly light, that seeks to illuminate ‘A New Creation’.

We will have heard on the news that Canberra has gone into summer recess;

Tony Abbot is no longer reframing broken promises

Joe Hockey is no longer pushing a budget uphill

Bill Shorten is no longer opposing everything

The greens are no longer complaining

And the cross bench are no longer trying to make sense

Our whole system of clockwork government is no longer playing with itself; and perhaps that gives us a power vacuum; an opportunity to pretend, to imagine and even to realize that “A New Creation’ is our doing and no one else’s.

*My mind withdrew its thoughts from experience,
extracting itself from the contradictory throng of sensuous images,
that it might find out what that light was wherein it was bathed...*

*And thus, with the flash of one hurried glance,
it attained to the vision of That Which Is.*

[Saint Augustine](#)

Peter Humphris