

14 December 2014 Third Sunday in Advent

Isaiah 61: 1-11

Psalm - Song of Mary (Luke 1: 47-55)

1 Thessalonians 5: 12-28

John 1 :6-8,19-28

[Advent 3B Dec 14, 2014 Text week](#)

In the first reading we hear that Isaiah realises that “*the spirit of the Lord GOD is upon him [me]*” and he also knows of his own Divine anointing.

What Isaiah doesn't know is that we claim the very same for ourselves in our baptism.

For those whose baptism was some time ago, reading Isaiah can therefore be a reminding for us of who we really are, a reminding, remembering and perhaps a rediscovery.

We might also read the “Song of Mary”, today's psalm, in the same way; for Mary's ‘yes’ in relation to bearing and birthing the Divine is also our claim. As the body of Christ we are bearers of Christ to the world and ‘birthers’ of Christ in the world.

Both of these texts are full of illustrations of the Divine activity, the dynamic reality of God; and both refer to the part we play in creating freedom, comfort and sustenance for ourselves and for all; they ground the giving of God, the giving of God's self is earthed in us.

We can assume that the early Christian church, the very early church retained a clear memory, even a feeling of Christ's revelation and teaching; an understanding before it became formalized and institutionalized into creedal doctrines, dogmas and bumper stickers.

Can we capture that same insight; can we still appreciate the ‘energy’ of Paul as he appeals to the church in Thessalonica?

In the second reading today, Paul identifies the reference points that underline his energy, his appreciation and understanding of the Divine activity in relation to the life of the Church.

Three of these stand out:

“seek to do good to one another and to all”

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances”

“hold fast to what is good”

And the outcome, for Paul, in engaging these aspects of his appeal is to find ourselves ‘entirely sanctified’

However when we look at ourselves and each other we probably doubt that we are entirely sanctified. So it is helpful to appreciate Paul’s letter as an appeal; it identifies a possible reality; and during Advent we have an opportunity to reflect on exactly that; our possibility and potential. What is it that we seek to bring to birth in the process of Christmas?

All of the readings today encourage us toward tomorrow, just as Advent encourages us toward Christmas.

Isaiah speaks from a world view of ‘vision’; he looks toward the future and speaks of that which is sown in the garden, that which is springing up; it is a vision of new life and the birth of a new creation.

Mary’s spirit rejoices in the gift of Divine love; gestation is her Advent and again has an orientation toward birth and a new creation.

Paul’s appeal clearly affirms a future for the church in Thessalonica that is entirely sanctified.

These three readings also have another common thread; Isaiah, Mary and Paul have an orientation beyond themselves; they participate in the future of others, they are part of, and live for, the communion of humanity.

The gospel this week once again focusses on John the Baptist (as it did last week) and as in the first three readings we find that John is not self-focused but rather is looking toward another, and toward the future.

The mystical quality of John’s gospel really does ask us to go beyond the literal.

John the Baptist is not pointing toward Jesus, but serves as an example to us of ‘Advent attitude’.

“*the voice of one crying out in the wilderness*” is the voice from a self-emptied place within; John only has a name, no status, qualifications, address, community or family; and so represents our core of being; he is us in the wilderness of our deepest soul.

The “*priests and Levites from Jerusalem*” sought to acknowledge him and sought to identify him with a known paradigm, they wanted to put him into a box of orthodox understanding. However his response illustrates that his orientation is not concerned with, or directed toward his ‘self’; rather he looks for and he points toward another ‘self’ a higher sense of self and one that ‘stands among you’; he knows that “*Among you stands one whom you do not know*”.

And we know the unfolding of the story for John points toward that higher self that is fully human and fully divine.

Rabindranath Tagore said: “What you are you do not see, what you see is your shadow”; and John the Baptist points us out of the shadows and toward our truth.

The affirming appeal of Paul very much is a call to the church to come out of the shadows, and to realise itself, realise our ‘selves’ as entirely sanctified; fully human and fully Divine.

However we have also to move away from and beyond the confines of past understandings; if we hold to the familiar understanding then we reduce the wisdom in today’s readings, we dilute them into doctrinal formulas that only serve to elevate the literal few mentioned in the biblical narratives.

But these are texts, words of life for each and for all of us.

Mary is not the mother of Jesus, she is an icon of us, bearers and birthers of the Divine. Isaiah is not some ancient man who saw into the future, he gives us the orientation of vision, inviting us to awaken that vision that takes us beyond our 20-20 vision.

And John the Baptist, is our icon for initiating our truest self, our truest being.... Moving from the shadow of disguise that we create around us, John invites us into all that our baptism claims....

The **Chandogya Upanishad** is one of the "primary" texts in the Hindu sacred writings and also speaks of our truest “light”: *“There is a light that shines beyond all things on earth, beyond the highest, the very highest heavens. This is the light that shines in your heart.”*

There is a light that shines in the heavens throughout Advent, leading us toward the truth.. leading us into a life that is beyond our imagination, yet there to be discovered.

And finally let’s hear again Paul’s affirming appeal to the Church; this time in the words of Winnie the Pooh

There is something you must always remember. You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.

You are the Body of Christ, and Christmas is our birth.

