

## Second Sunday in Advent 2021

### Lighting of Advent Candle

Arise, take courage, and catch a glimpse of peace! **The warm glow of the Divine lightens our hearts.** We are together, not alone. In spirit and in community we gather on this second Sunday in Advent in solidarity and with courage to partner for a world full of peace where all of creation will flourish. Our witness is to and for peace. *[the 2<sup>nd</sup> candle is lighted]*

**Peace is real and possible. In solidarity we pray, work, and wait for its blossoming.** We pray:

God-of-peace-and-possibility, kindle in the hearts of all compassion and love so that goodness, just deeds, the common good, and trust may flourish. Bless and gift all with hope for a future of peace built on justice for all. In the name of the child, the peaceful one, Amen.

### Opening Hymn

138 Come thou long expected Jesus

### Opening Prayers

Prepare the way of the Lord, John the Baptist cries out

Like the prophets, like John the Baptist, we come before you, O God, from the wilderness of our lives to prepare the way of the Lord, to make our hearts ready to receive you word, your promises, your life, your nourishment at the Lord's table, and so we pray....

**May the warmth of our love prepare the way of the Lord**

**May our will for justice prepare the way of the Lord**

**May our thirst for truth prepare the way of the Lord**

**May our dream for peace prepare the way of the Lord. Amen.**

### Dedication of Toys

Loving God we bring to you these gifts of toys which we hope will bring joy to those who will receive them. We know that there are many for whom this festive time is a difficult one and we give thanks for those organisations who make it their mission to spread the joy and hope of this time. We give thanks and we ask your blessing on all who distribute and those who receive these gifts. In Jesus' name we pray.  
Amen

## **Scripture Readings** Isaiah 11: 1-10 & Luke 3: 1-6

### **Hymn**

134 On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's cry  
(tune: Winchester New)

### **Reflection**

John the Baptist....we meet him every Advent season and the first thing many of us remember of John is that "he wore clothes made of camel hair, with a leather belt around his waist and his food was locusts and honey" And we also get the impression that John was not the most charming of people. He was blunt; he didn't mince words. He was passionate, tough and uncompromising. Yes, at first glance everything about John may seem unappealing but still, the crowd flocks to him. They want to hear him speak. They seem to know that he is a messenger of God; a messenger in the tradition of the prophets, fearless and willing to say it as it is....

Somehow John knew that the world as it was, and as it always had been, was to be no more; a new world was about to be revealed. He could sense it. Someone was coming, things were changing.....and it was time to get ready, to turn around, to prepare the way..... to get rid of anything that was hindering the way of the One who is to come.....Things like greed and selfishness, hostility and resentment, doubt and despair.

And many people were drawn to John because they were tired of the way things were and the lives they led. They were looking for relief from their oppressed lives, lived under Roman rule. They were hoping for safety and justice and peace. For a long time they had been waiting and finally....here was someone who offered them a chance of newness of life – a radical new vision of how life could be. Here was a prophet – like the prophets of old – calling them into the river to get baptized and coming out of the water as new people with a new life.

"Repent for the Kingdom has come near" John was telling the people. Repent? Yes, repent! That is the roadwork of Advent....that is how the way of the Lord needs to be prepared....

Here John was speaking to a need and a deep longing....the longing for freedom from all that can keep people captive – everything that keeps us from God and from God's peace and love and righteousness..... the longing for a change of heart and a new way of living.

So let us talk about this repentance and the freedom and newness of life that it leads to.....Let us talk about the vision of peace that Isaiah pictured so beautifully and that John reminded the people of as he called them to repentance.....

For what is repentance? If you think of repentance as primarily being sorry for your sins, confessing and making up for them then I must tell you that that is not the biblical meaning of the word. In the Bible, and as John tells us, repentance is about change....turning your life around and turning to God. In the OT its meaning is shaped by the Jewish expectation of a return from exile....to follow the way that leads out of exile, separation...to return to God.

In the NT an additional meaning is added. Repent means to “go beyond the mind you have”...to enter a new mindset, a new way of thinking and of seeing. To repent means to see things differently. In the words of Bob Marley it is to “emancipate yourself from mental slavery..” Repent is imagining that things can be different; life can be different; the world can be different. Imagine! Yes, imagine.....

That is what the prophet Isaiah did. Isaiah imagined a world of peace and harmony; he envisioned “shalom” in the beautiful image that he paints of a new creation. A peaceful kingdom where predator and prey live together in peace as *“the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them”*

Can we imagine that peace? Can we imagine a world in which the rules of life will be changed? A world in which peace will reign?

Walter Brueggemann comments on the vision in Isaiah chapter 11 when he writes: “Unheard of and unimaginable! All these images of peace and unity seem to me so abnormal that they are not worth reflecting on. But then I look again and notice something else. The poet means to say that in the new age these are the normal things. And the effect is to show the real abnormalities of life, which we have taken for granted. We have lived with the abnormal so long that we have gotten used to them and we think they are normal.”

Now doesn't that make you think? Is it normal that there is such a gap between the rich and the poor, between nations and within our own society? Is it normal that students leave college and university with a huge debt to pay off? Is it normal that we have homeless people in our rich country? Is it normal that money/economics determines our life? Is it normal that many people suffer stress and depression? Is it normal

that children have to sit so many tests? Is it normal that we are constantly watched by CCTV, that we have to be submitted to all kinds of security measures to travel, that we have to remember so many passwords to prove our identity.....Is it normal that we are spending billions on arms, that we close our borders to refugees, that we have accepted to live with climate change....What else can you think of?

This really calls for repentance...to see things differently, not to accept things as they are – as it somehow has become part of normal life – but to be challenged and challenge each other by a new vision of what could be.....a vision of how God intended the world to be, and our lives to be.

Isaiah in his vision, John in his call to repentance, Jesus as the expected Prince of Peace remind us that a different world is possible. Again and again, God offers us a dream of peace again.....Can we share that dream with others? Can we make that dream a reality? Let us prepare for the coming of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, not only at Christmas but all through the year!

## **Prayers of Intercession**

### **Dedication of Offering**

May generosity be our watchword.....

Generosity of gifts presented. Generosity of faith shared. Generosity of hope declared. Bless our gifts, O God, in the generous spirit of Jesus Christ.

## **Celebration of Communion**

**Closing Hymn**                      129 The race that long in darkness pined  
(tune: St Magnus)

### **Blessing**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord....and take with you the vision and reality of God's peace that makes this world a better, more just place for all. May the love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever. Amen.