

Sermon for 9.12.18 Second Sunday in Advent.

Today we linger in Advent - the second Sunday of the season - and we wait to celebrate the one who is to come into the world.

I have often said that during this sacred time it is helpful to take time for rest and to ponder in silence what lies ahead with Christ's birth in the world and in ourselves.

I believe also that Advent is a time of gratitude and what can help us have an attitude of gratitude is simply to notice the beauty in the creation around us.

Particularly at this time of year in Brisbane this isn't hard to do, for this is when the Poinciana trees and their orange red flowers blossom forth and coupled with their green foliage against the very blue sky –is surely a sight to behold.

The many frangipani trees now in bloom are also something that makes this a very special time and place. This way of gratitude in its simplicity echoes the way in which Jesus comes into the world in his birth in a stable.

In our scripture readings today, the first reading is from Malachi and we hear that God is sending his messenger to prepare the way for the one who is to come.

Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament in the Christian bible and is a prophetic work written about 500 years before the birth of Christ. The Christian faith belief is, that this text points to a newness that is about to be revealed in Christ. The path is being made straight for the arrival of the one who will initiate the dawning of the new day.

In the gospel of Luke we hear that the one who makes the path straight, is John the Baptist.

In all of the gospels the ministry of Jesus begins with the preparation by John.

In John's era it was an oppressive time in Hebrew history and many thought that the covenant that God had made with them had been forgotten. At this time in history Tiberius had taken the place of Augustus Caesar and was a ruthless ruler who was worshipped as a god in the eastern parts of the empire.

Two of Herod the Great's sons, Antipas and Phillip were ruling somewhat shakily under Roman permission in the north, but Rome had taken direct control of the south including Jerusalem itself. Pontius Pilate was the prefect there and served under Tiberius.

The high priests themselves Annas and Caiaphas collaborated with the corrupt authorities and many devout Jews longed for a new word from God.

Then with little introduction, out of the wilderness came John the Baptist. The wilderness was the place where many of the prophets were strengthened and where in the silence there, they heard what God was calling them to do.

The people who were desperately looking for someone they could believe in, found their man in John. He was a straight shooter (and we'll hear more of that side of him next week) and he called many to repentance and baptism.

In all of the gospel narratives, John performed baptisms at the river Jordan.

In each gospel his appearance also announced the arrival of a particular spiritual practice.

In Matthew, John urged the new journey, out from the place of the old Temple.

In Mark, his call was to endure the trial of repentance in the wilderness; in the gospel of John, he pointed to, and proclaimed, the reality of Jesus the Christ and in Luke he called the assembled crowd to accountability for their actions.

This necessary way of wholesome preparation, was what God had called John to do.

John preached the kingdom yet to come and he taught according to the law.

Jesus, as the one who was, and is to come, preached the kingdom in the here and now, in the ordinary and the everyday. And taught us how to love God and each other by his example and his presence among us as one of us.

During the week I observed something from the rectory veranda that I would like to share with you in this sermon today. I was watching Paul load up the Ute with fallen tree branches and other debris blown about in the windy weather we've had.

As I watched I noticed a bush turkey in the grass down below the balcony. It was lying down, and apparently injured. I watched it for a few minutes and noticed that the injured turkey's mate came and stayed with it as it tried to recover. I stayed watching for about 15 minutes and the two of them stayed together during this time - one injured and the other present and supportive. And as I watched I thought to myself how much comfort there is in mere presence.

My mind then went straight to my experience in ministry and being with people who are sick and who are dying and how I have observed that at these times there is often a family member or members sitting with their loved one - simply being present - often without any words spoken. How powerful that is for both the sick / the dying and for the loved one bringing their love made tangible by their presence.

Then my thoughts turned to this time of waiting, lingering in advent and the thought of Jesus coming into this world and it was clear to me that he comes simply to be present to us and present with us - whom ever, whatever and wherever, we are.

Whether we are healthy, injured or dying. To be present with us in all our fragility, vulnerability and joy. To be present with us now in this age in the Holy Spirit. And, I believe it is his greatest gift to us for we need only be open to his love and his companionship to receive it. Jesus tells us at the end of Matthews's gospel - *I am with you always*. It is a very good passage to remember in times of need and sorrow and in times of joy.

Thomas Keating writes that the presence of God is with us all the time. *It is not so much on a daily basis but on a moment to moment basis, so it is really now after now after now after now. This may not stop our suffering, but it does comfort us in such a profound way, that fear can lessen and leave us altogether.*<sup>1</sup>

---

1

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=thomas+keating+living+in+the+presence+of+the+lord&view=detail&mid=CA6886384345C1C28198CA6886384345C1C28198&FORM=VIRE>  
Accessed 8.12.18.

So Let us this advent look up and look out at the beauty of creation around us.

God is present there and here in our being.

This Advent let us walk with the God who holds us as we await the manifestation of his presence in his son Jesus Christ.

The Lord be with you.