

Traditional Home service
Sunday 10th December
Advent 2

OPENING PRAYER

God our Father, you spoke to the prophets of old of a Saviour who would bring peace. You helped them to spread the joyful message of his coming kingdom. Help us, as we prepare to celebrate his birth, to share with those around us the good news of your power and love. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the light who is coming into the world.

Amen.

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Let us return to the Lord our God and say to him:

Father, we have sinned against heaven and against you. We are not worthy to be called your children. We turn to you again. Have mercy on us, bring us back to yourself as those who once were dead but now have life through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts. Open our lips, Lord: and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*)

READINGS - Isaiah 40,1-11
2 Peter 3:8-15a
Mark 1,1-8

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 2 (*Angels from the Realms of Glory*)

CONCLUSION

The Lord bless you and watch over you, the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord look kindly on you and give you peace; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.

TALK

Hymns to use

1 O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.*

2 O come, O Wisdom from on high,
who ordered all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show
and teach us in its ways to go.

Refrain

3 O come, O come, great Lord of might,
who to your tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times did give the law
in cloud and majesty and awe.

Refrain

4 O come, O Branch of Jesse's stem,
unto your own and rescue them!
From depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave.

Refrain

5 O come, O Key of David, come
and open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe for us the heavenward road
and bar the way to death's abode.

Refrain

6 O come, O Bright and Morning Star,
and bring us comfort from afar!
Dispel the shadows of the night
and turn our darkness into light.

Refrain

7 O come, O King of nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind.
Bid all our sad divisions cease
and be yourself our King of Peace.

Refrain

1 Angels from the realms of glory,
wing your flight o'er all the earth;
ye who sang creation's story
now proclaim Messiah's birth:

Refrain:

*Come and worship, come and worship,
worship Christ, the newborn king.*

2 Shepherds, in the field abiding,
watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing;
yonder shines the infant light:

Refrain

3 Sages, leave your contemplations,
brighter visions beam afar;
seek the great Desire of nations;
ye have seen his natal star:

Refrain

Sermon - Adrian Morton
Isaiah 40,1-11 Mark 1,1-8
The call of the prophet....

The focus for the second Sunday of Advent is on the prophets.

Nigel opened the service with the prayer:

God our Father, you spoke to the prophets of old of a Saviour who would bring peace. You helped them to spread the joyful message of his coming kingdom.

So the prophets were those who heard from the Lord and passed the message on to the people.

And the prophets' message was a message of joy.

But in amongst that message of joy there were often also words of judgement.

Which we'll see...

But one of the main roles of the prophets, was to call people back into relationship, back into intimacy with God.

If the people had strayed away.
Or if the people had fallen into sin.

They would call people back to the relationship that they considered **the** most life giving relationship.

The prophets knew that if the people got that relationship right.
If they fostered that relationship correctly.

Then life would go well for them.
The people would experience the blessings of God on their life.

And that is still the role of prophetic people today.
To call people back to God, back to intimacy with him.
To call people back to a life of holiness.

That is what sets the prophetic person's heart on fire.

And if you know you have a strong prophetic gifting you'll recognise that in you.

This is what is really important, relationship, intimacy with the Lord.

Now this Isaiah 40 reading is pointing forward, of course, to the coming of Jesus.

And it is pointing forward to the role John the Baptist had in preparing for the coming of Jesus...

And in this reading the prophet Isaiah is revealing much about the character of God.

This is the God I'm calling you back to.
This is what He is like.

I said there is judgement in this and that actually is in Ch39:5-7...

When this was written it didn't have either nice breaks for the Chapters so in our versions Ch 39 and 40 just followed each without any demarcation.

Isaiah had just been telling King Hezekiah that a time is coming..

and it says...

"when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord. Even some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood, will be taken away..."

Implication being that they will lose connection to the temple.
Which housed and symbolised the presence of God.

Hezekiah, nice chap as he was, thought that's good, at least there will be peace and security in my lifetime....

I'm all right jack...! Not bothered about the rest of you!

So we get the judgement, then we get the immediate

*"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God...
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for..."*

And this again is revealing what God is like. This is the God Isaiah is calling the people back to.

This is the kind of God prophetic people today are calling people back to...

Yes whilst there is judgement, that is being dealt with.

And no sooner than judgment is pronounced than an equally just comfort is heralded.

And if you look at these verses in detail you will see that there is one voice judgment to one nation.

Followed, in our verses by 3 voices of comfort that spreads out to embrace the whole world.

Yes there is judgment for sin. But there is far more grace, with wider reaching consequences.

“Speak tenderly” means speak to the heart.. It has an image of a young man wooing his girl. Someone bringing reassurance...

Proclaiming that her sin has been paid for..

If you read further we get this picture of God as shepherd.

So verse 11 reads:

“He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; He gently leads those that have young.”

This is such a great picture...

Do you know that you are being carried close to his heart.

The Lord is keeping you safe and you are close to his heart.

For those who have young children... this is always such an encouraging passage.

He gently leads those that have young.

The Lord sees and knows your hard work.

The broken nights... the snotty noses, the endless nappies, often just when you are about to leave the house...

<Talk about ferries with young children...!>

The Lord sees it all and gently leads those that have young.

This is what God is like.

Speaking tenderly to His people.
Dealing with their sin.
Carrying them close to his heart.
Gently leading those that have young.

This is the God that the prophets were calling people back to.

In this season of Advent, it is still a good message to hear.
Have you strayed away from God.
Have you fallen into sin.

Then come back to **the** relationship that is life giving.

I want to talk about two distractions that will hinder our relationship with God.

The first one is unconfessed sin.

This isn't about hidden sins we know nothing about.

If we have sin in our life that we are not aware of, that won't hinder us with the Lord.

God does not judge what we do not know.

But sin we know we have and its unconfessed will hinder us.

How do we know we have unconfessed sin?
Firstly by just asking, “What can't we thank God for?”

More reliable than that though is our conscience.

Our conscience, which is part of our spiritual faculty, will let us know.

The testimony of our conscience is more reliable than the testimony of others.

2 Tim 1:3 says we can only serve God with a clear conscience.

Why, because unless our conscience is clear, fear and doubt undermine our spiritual capacity for fellowship with God.

We are deprived of our freedom to fellowship freely with God.

And its not that God withdraws from us when we have unconfessed sin.
His love for us is steadfast.
His love for us remains furious towards us.

Its just that we lose our confidence when our conscience gets offended; when our conscience is murky.

What can happen when our conscience is telling us about unconfessed sin?

One, we can argue with it?
Its not that bad, other people do it... God won't really mind..

One we can agree with it?

Two, we can try and ease it with good works.
I may be doing that but at least I'm doing lots of good works.
At least I'm serving people well..
And so we try and ease our conscience with good works.

Arguing with our conscience or trying to ease it won't work.

We have to clear it, by confessing our sin, and trusting in the blood of Jesus.

Confessing our sin is simply agreeing with God.
That His perspective on whatever it is, is the right one.
And you are going to agree with Him.

And we confess our sin primarily to God.
But if that doesn't cleanse your conscience, confess your sin to a trusted brother and sister in Christ.

Bringing sin into the light with others can go along way to remove its power.

I've noticed when I've confessed my sin, my mind goes quieter.

Thos who have done the FIC course, and who have done the ministry day...

Which is all about confessing sin, releasing forgiveness to those who have hurt us..

You may recognise that when you have done that, your mind, your thought life is quieter.

There isn't so much noise...

That seems to be the testimony of many who go through that day.

Being faithful to our conscience is the first step towards sanctification, becoming more holy.

The first distraction is unconfessed sin.

The second distraction we have is busyness.

Jesus was often busy.
We read that sometimes he got exhausted by his ministry.
He allowed himself to be interrupted on occasions.
And changed what he was doing.

But what Jesus was able to do, was not allow busyness to be elevated above his relationship with the Father.

And what he was also able to do, was only those things sanctioned by the Father.

I don't know about you..

But I feel I'm quite successful at allowing busyness to be elevated above my relationship with God.

Or I allow myself to be involved in lots of activities that when I step back from, I really wonder whether these are sanctioned by God.

Jesus, in John 15 said "*apart from me you can do nothing.*"

And the context is intimacy with Him.
Relationship with Him.

What did he mean that?

Because we can do lots of things apart from Him.

I think we can get very busy apart from Him.

So what did he mean?

Well I think he was saying you can do nothing fruitful, nothing that will have kingdom impact, apart from Him.

And I know it is sometimes difficult to discern whether what we are doing is really right.

Sometimes it just seems hard work and not much fruit is seen.

Sometimes we just have to do something...

<I remember a minister called David Parker, who used to speak at New Wine events, and he told a story where he had gone to a new area and didn't do anything at first because he wasn't sure whether it was what God really wanted him to do. And he was like paralysed by inaction and indecision. Eventually, he felt the Lord say to him, "just do something...">

So this isn't an exact science.

I wonder though whether Advent is a good time to step back and ask ourselves a number of questions:

Am I allowing others to set my agenda?
Am I really being fruitful in this activity?
Am I elevating busyness to the detriment of cultivating relationship, intimacy with the Lord.

CONCLUSION

A primary role of the prophet is to call back people into relationship, into intimacy with the Lord.

There can be two distractions for us:

Unconfessed sin, and
Busyness.

<Funeral on Friday at Wollaston.. the most terrifying response to hear when we meet Jesus is:

Matthew 7:21-23

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

Lord spare us from that!

Amen.