

13/12/20: Advent 3: Circuit Podcast: John 1 v6-8, 19-28

Hello

After hearing today's reading you might be thinking "not John the Baptist again, didn't we have him last week?" Well, we did have a reading about John last week, but as John himself might have said, it's not about him, it's about Jesus. John is the perfect Advent person: it was his mission, his ministry, to point to Jesus, to lead the way to Jesus, to tell people Jesus was coming. If you listen to Handel's Messiah, John gets some of the big tunes: "make straight in the desert, a highway for our God", and "Behold the Lamb of God", but they're all about showing the way to Jesus. To go from music to pictures, older paintings showing John would often have him with an extra-long index finger, standing at the side somewhere, pointing to Jesus

Last week we heard about John's message from the wilderness, of making a straight and level path for the fullness of life, a highway for God

This week, we hear about John's testimony to the Light, the true light, which enlightens everyone. Jesus the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

This has been a year of darkness for many people, and it still is. So many have lost loved ones, because of the virus directly, or because of the effects on mental health. So many people have also lost opportunities, jobs, money and security. There has been a huge rise in loneliness and in hardship. And in this darkness so many lights have shone more brightly: the value of care work and medical work, of cleaning and sanitation, of transport and delivery, of teaching and of expertise, has shone more brightly. Kindness between neighbours and between strangers has reminded us of our shared humanity. Dedication and service has gone way beyond what would be expected. There are so many ways in which so many people have been light shining in the darkness.

It wasn't long before John the Baptist found himself facing questions from the religious authorities, arguing about the details: "Who are you?" they asked. John made it clear he wasn't the Messiah, and he wasn't Elijah or another prophet. You might remember that Jesus later did say John was a kind of Elijah, and he was the greatest prophet, so why didn't John just own up to it? Wouldn't that have made his life easier? Actually, I think they would have stopped listening to him altogether.

There's a saying among news reporters and publicity people, that it's the story that's important, not the reporter, and the day the reporter becomes the story is the day for them to go. John didn't want to become the story. You could say he wanted to be just a voice and a pointing finger. When they pushed him for a straight answer he said "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ""Make straight the way of the Lord""", and when they pushed him again he told them to look out for the one coming after him, who was going to be so much greater.

So, in the words of today's reading, John the Baptist came to testify to the light, the true light which enlightens everyone. In John's Gospel, Jesus is the Word and the Light, the Word which spoke in the darkness and commanded life, and the Light which shines in the darkness and will never be overcome. Jesus is there from before creation, into infinity. No wonder John says he isn't worthy to untie his shoes.

John's testimony, his life's message, was that Jesus is the true light, which enlightens everyone, and He was coming into the world. Enlighten is an interesting word. It can mean that Jesus the Light shines upon everyone. It can mean that Jesus the Light shines into everyone. It can mean that Jesus the Light shines from everyone. It can mean all three at

the same time, and Jesus often spoke about light: that His followers are the light of the world; that we should let our light shine; that He Himself is the Light of the world. Later in John's Gospel Jesus says "I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness", and in another place He said that He had come to give us life in all its fullness.

As we are reminded of the hope that came with Jesus, we can allow Him to enlighten us: we can come into His light and believe in Him, we can allow His light to shine into us and accept His love for us; we can allow His light to shine from us, that we may pass on what we have received, that we may love others as we are loved by God, and in all this, that in today's darkness too, Jesus the Light may shine, upon us and into us and from us, and we may see the darkness pushed further and further back, living in the hope of the day when there is no more darkness, and all that we see is the glory of Jesus