

## **A Reflection from Revd Jane for the Third Sunday in Advent**

I don't know about you but it seems that there are more Christmas lights than ever around this year. Perhaps it is because people are trying to dispel the gloom they are feeling over the virus and the difficulties and loss of this year. It's been a long dark year and the lights bring some cheer and joy into the darkness. Just a tiny speck of light can change the dark that seems to overwhelm at times.

It must have felt like that for those living in Israel at the time of our readings. Roman forces had been in occupation for some time and there was no indication of when it would end. The occupation, and the darkness of that occupation must have felt it was stretching on and on forever. Just as we have longed for something to change so that we are no longer in lockdown and fear of the virus, how much more must they have longed for the occupation to end. They were brutal times.

The Temple too was corrupt - led by Annas who was later removed and Caiaphas his son-in-law put in his place. Yet Annas continued to wield power. In the story of Jesus' trial it is to Annas Jesus is taken first and then Caiaphas the High Priest (Jn 18)

Into this darkness came John. He was from a priestly family and should have been at the Temple but it was in the wilderness he was fashioned by God. It was to the wilderness he was sent to find his voice so that he who was not the light could testify to the One who is the Light of the world.

It was no wonder John's ministry took off - here was a first glimpse of hope in a dark world.

John was sent by God to bear witness to Jesus and who Jesus was. Sent is an interesting word. We often think of 'calling' - God 'called' me to do this...(whatever it is), yet John was sent by God. Jesus was sent by the Father. Jesus' disciples were sent out by him. Jesus sends us out too. Where are you being sent at this time?

We are sent into a dark world to make known the One who is the Light. We use our voice that we have found in the wilderness (see last week's service) to declare the one who is the Word. We are baptized with water but through Jesus we receive the baptism of the Spirit - so that we too walk in the power and anointing that Jesus had. Christ - The Anointed One; Christian - Little Anointed One.

Isaiah 61 shows the Church of Jesus living and moving in the power of the Spirit as it is truly meant to be - operating under the power of his Kingdom anointing and authority. Not a church going through the motions with dead formalism, having the form of godliness but lacking the power. This is the Church alive and vibrant. Binding up the broken hearted, comforting those who mourn, seeing those who are held captive released.

Perhaps some of you today feel you yourselves are in that place of darkness - of being held captive perhaps through fear; broken hearted, mourning the loss of loved

ones or the way of life you had once known. There might be darkness in your life or a sense of being in the wilderness. Yet into all these situations God wants to bring his transforming power and the light of Jesus. He wants us to come to a place where we are prepared and ready ourselves, walking in the reality of the year of the Lord's favour - to have a crown of beauty instead of ashes, oil of gladness instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

These words from Isaiah were spoken to God's people in anticipation of returning from exile; they also speak of the coming Messiah. Jesus himself reads these words in the synagogue when he returns from the wilderness, and tells the people listening, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing (Luke 4: 18 - 19).

Just as John was sent; just as Jesus was sent, we too are sent into the world. Into the darkness we are sent to testify to the one who is the Light of the world; sent to the poor and marginalized, sent to the broken hearted and the captive. It won't always be easy. We see John being interrogated by the religious leaders in this passage and later he was killed. Many Christians today face persecution and death because of their faith. But we are sent by the one who was killed, yet who death could not hold and he rose again; and he will be coming again in power and great glory.

Let us be ready and prepared for that time - being found doing what we should, with the Church moving in the authority and power he has given us. In Jesus name, amen.

### **Prayer**

Spend some time with the Lord. If you are feeling bruised or broken; held captive by fear or doubt or anything else that is keeping you a prisoner; broken hearted or mourning, spend time telling the Lord. The Lord loves you and wants to work his healing in our lives. He also wants his Church to be fit and made ready. Allow the presence of Jesus to bring you peace.

Lord throughout your word we see that it is in the wilderness that you meet with people and through that time you deepen your fellowship with them. Help us to be open in our times of darkness to your Light and to the tender comfort you want to bring us. We acknowledge that sometimes our brokenness runs deep and so we ask that you help us to stay the course with you so that we really know what it is to come through the other side and to enter fully into the experience of the oil of gladness and joy being poured over us, and to be able to put on the garment of praise. We thank you for your love and tenderness.

Help us to be those who bring this good news to others, to see others' lives transformed - may we be the Church that you have anointed us to be, walking in Kingdom power and authority for your glory. In Jesus name, Amen.