

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent 061220

Isa 40:1-11; Ps 85:8-end; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

Greetings my sisters and brothers in Christ! Welcome to the Good News about Jesus Christ on the day we light the second Advent Candle and remember the place of the teachings of Torah and the Prophets in bringing us this Very Good News.

I wonder...if someone was writing the story of your life how would it begin? With you being born, with your acts of kindness or chivalry or with a dramatic moment or turning point in your life?

If you were writing Good News about Jesus, where would you begin?

If, as an author, you wanted to encourage and grow a thriving Christian Community would you, like Luke and Matthew begin with Jesus' birth? Or, like Mark, would you plunge into Jesus' handiwork in revealing who, what and how God is, God does and God includes?

What the author Mark spent years coming to understand was that John, Jesus' cousin, was the chorus to Jesus' early life. He had jumped when Mary and Elizabeth met during their pregnancies, for example. Mark begins his Gospel by reassuring his readers that John knew his own life's work was to prepare the way, a pathway, for the beginning of Jesus' public life.

I don't know about you, but I find I remember things for longer and more clearly, if they are repeated. This is especially true of music and lyrics. When music is played, I remember the tune, the words and I'm taken out of myself to another time and place. With Ian's Zoom expertise I would like to explore John's life through music.

First of all, we hear a few seconds from Godspell's 'Prepare Ye the Way of The Lord'. It begins with the blowing of the shofar. The shofar is a ram's horn blown loudly at significant Jewish festivals, including on Shabbat, to announce the New Moon and the anointing of a new king.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuUI522\\_8jQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuUI522_8jQ) first 53 secs only

So, John, the Baptizer, was preparing a way into the future. John had grown up knowing Torah and the history of the Prophets inside out. He joined a Community in the Desert to listen to God more closely, to hear God's voice. He knew the Prophets' words were from God, for the people.

Listen to this piece of music, written by Handel, focusing on words from the Prophet Isaiah [40:1-3] which John would have read and repeated many times during his lifetime: words which are incomprehensibly relevant for us today... Nicholas Sharratt sings the chorus 'Comfort ye' from Handel's Messiah.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Pz9BCMFoP8> 2 minutes 54 secs

To me, the most amazing thing about John the Baptist was his capacity to lay aside who he was and declare who Jesus was. John advertised, he posted, Jesus to everyone who saw their need to be sorry for, repent, of their sin, their turning away from God. 'Turn back', he cried out! 'Prepare your hearts to live differently'. John diminished while Jesus increased. Listen to this worship song written by Jon Thurlow. The grammar is truly awful but the melody beautiful and haunting in its illustration of this message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdzjik11sB0> 2 mins 48 secs

John recognises Jesus in the fruits of his work among the poor, the weak, the sick, those on the edges, those who are not accepted in society for any number of reasons. Advent is our opportunity to recognise this. Advent is like climbing slowly up into dark loft space, turning on the light, searching for tightly packed and squished decorations, straightening them out, dusting them off and polishing them up so they are ready to shine once more.

The second letter of Peter highlights and underlines all of this by reminding us that, one day to God is like a thousand and that a thousand days to God are like one day so, our waiting expectantly for the new heaven and the new earth are our living experience of God being with us today and always. As Peter succinctly wrote, 'God's patience is our salvation'. These are prophetic words and I offer them to you to take away and repeat throughout Advent: 'God's patience is our salvation'.

This final piece of music is sung in Russian and speaks of John, not the Baptist, but the author of the Book of Revelation – the message however is the same, the new heaven and the new earth are not only waiting for us, they are worth waiting for.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRBhg7Z9YR0&list=LLS7izIy1L0vrtAnQjbCx6Cg&index=43> 1 min 45

'God's patience is our salvation.'

Psalm 139 prayer or the Collect: *Creator God, may every breath we take be for your glory, may every footstep show you as our way, that, trusting in your presence in this world, we may, beyond this life, still be with you where you are alive and reign for ever and ever. Amen*