

Talk for Sunday 6th December

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight Oh Lord our strength and redeemer. Amen

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight.” (Mark 1:2)

Whenever there is any kind of celebration or important occasion, there is always a huge amount of preparation to do beforehand, which only those involved can fully appreciate. Just think of the preparations that go into a wedding, a surprise party. Preparation often begins weeks, months, even years before the actual event. Things don't just happen by themselves: without adequate preparation, the occasion suffers, the celebration doesn't quite go with a swing, people don't have quite as good a time as they had hoped. Sometimes, however we can get so wrapped up in all the preparations that we almost forget the thing we are preparing for. Sometimes, it can all get so stressful that we forgot that we are looking forward to something essentially very happy. In our readings today we hear about the preparations that were made for the first coming of the Lord. Preparation is another great theme of Advent and on this second Sunday of Advent we will spend some time thinking about how we are preparing our hearts and minds for the arrival of Jesus this Christmas.

In our Old Testament reading Isaiah speaks of a voice crying out with these words “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed” (Isaiah 40: 3a-5a) Isaiah is sure that our God is coming to us and that we need to prepare. He tells us of the messenger that will go before his coming to see all is ready. In the olden days, when travel was difficult and dangerous, if a king was on a journey someone was sent ahead to see if the road was fit for the king. The aim was to remove obstacles in the road, to fill in holes and to level off bumps: rough places were smooth. Then they had to make sure the king would get a good reception, that accommodation was prepared, making sure there was room for the king, and he would be welcome. Once everything was ready the king would come in all his glory. Mark in the opening verse of his gospel is sure that Jesus is the promised one, the messiah, the king we need to be ready to receive and that John the Baptist is the messenger sent to prepare his way. John says to the people ‘Turn around; you are going the wrong way. You will not be ready for God if you go on like this. Repent and be cleansed. Say sorry for the wrong you have done and turn to God. John called on the people to prepare themselves by repenting, and by making the necessary changes in their own lives so that they would be ready to welcome the Lord. Repentance means turning away from the things that we know are wrong and turning towards God. John's message is as much for us as it was for those who first heard it. He calls out to us today to make the same changes, the same preparations to receive the Good news, by putting our relationship with God and other right. We need to value this time of preparation, as a time for learning about God and about ourselves. It is a time to build up relationships with God and each other. To make space and time in the busyness of life to connect with God through prayer, worship, and scripture, to make our hearts ready to welcome Jesus. It is a time always to look to the future and to remind each other of the hope that lies before us. It is a time to connect with each other and to encourage each other in our faith. This Advent John calls us to prepare the way of the Lord.

Christmas is one of those celebrations that requires preparation, and we can often spend weeks even months preparing for this one day. How much time do we spend preparing for the coming of God to us? If someone is coming to stay, we will make sure there is room for them, that we have time for them, that we will give them some attention. Our God comes and seeks room in our lives; he wants us to be aware of him, for us to give him some of our time and attention. Are you prepared for this? What do you need to do this Advent to be ready? Take a few moments now to reflect on these questions as you get ready to welcome Jesus this Christmas.