



**Rev Diana Rattray**

**Prepare the way**

Isaiah 11: 1-10

Matthew 3: 1-12

Year A Advent 2

4 December 2022

For the first time in three years the Franklin Road lights, in Ponsonby, have been turned on again. In the midst of the old favourites, new displays have been added as new people have joined the Franklin Road community. Sacred and secular the lights are enjoyed by many during the month of December. We have only just started the season of advent and I have already being greeted with Merry Christmas and have had to do my supermarket shop while Snoopy's Christmas and other secular Christmas songs were being played loudly. There is a sense of - if we can't beat them then join them. Surely in the church if we are the true guardians of Christmas we should ban the singing of carols and eating of Christmas mince pies until Christmas Eve.

However we live in a world where culture and expectations have changed and the celebration, and expectation of Christmas seems to be accepted as beginning when the calendar turns over to 1 December.

While we may have to accept this reality I do not think we should abandon Advent. On this second Sunday of Advent, the first Sunday in December, the question is how do we continue to observe and journey through Advent in a way that enables us to anticipate Christmas and prepare for it spiritually? In Advent we are called into a state of active waiting. This is a state that recognises and embraces glimpses of God's presence in the world. It is a state that recalls God's historic, yet ever present, actions.

It is a state that speaks of the almost -but not quite- nature of our Christian living which yearns for but cannot quite achieve divine perfection.

However most of all Advent calls us to the now - the present moment - to a still, yet active - commitment to the life we lead now. Such a tall ask when we in the Southern Hemisphere are in the midst of end of year events, exams, prize-givings, dance and choir shows, work and family functions before some head away for summer holidays.

Today we lit the candle of peace on the Advent wreath. In Isaiah we hear of the peace that goes so far beyond what we know now that even the natural order of beasts and prey is changed. Visions of the end show us more of the world as God would want it to be. We are encouraged to look for and proclaim the times in our world when something truly amazing happens. When those who kill or maim are able to be forgiven rather than the seeking of revenge. How we long for fair treatment from others, quick to pull up those who base their judgements on appearance, false information or hearsay and yet we are often just as quick to judge those others. Complex moral and ethical debates that impact us all, and often the most vulnerable in our midst.

Today's passage from Isaiah inspires us not only to seek the vision but also to spring into action. What are the moments in our community or nation or world that renew our determination to bring about such world shattering peace? We long for nature to return to the harmony of Isaiah's prophesy, yet nature is impacted by our actions. The climate emergency continues to show forth in extreme weather events and natural disasters. We cannot wait for a prefect tranquillity that will miraculously happen when Christ reigns over the earth. Our faith, our journeys, our experience need to bring that catalyst for change now.

In the gospel reading, John the Baptist draws crowds to himself at the Jordan River with the call to repentance and the promise of the kingdom of heaven. John, too, judges people by their hearts, not

merely by their outward appearances. He is echoing the prophesy of Isaiah. Prepare the way of the Lord, words all too familiar if you ever watched or were part of a Godspell production! Both prophets. Isaiah and John the Baptist taught that the message of repentance is good news for those who listen and who seek the healing forgiveness of God's love, but is terrible news to those who refuse to listen and do not get to experience the hope. The Pharisees and the Sadducees, the respectable and the pious, do not get a warm welcome to the Jordan. "You brood of vipers!" John calls them. Yet even vipers will be transformed in the peaceable kingdom. John does not deny them baptism or refuse to hear their confessions. Instead, calls them to "Bear fruit worthy of repentance." Fruit worthy of repentance cannot grow without deeply changing our self-perceptions.

John would not allow the Pharisees and Sadducees to rest on their status, their past, or their ancestry. Goodness does not depend upon who you have been, or where you have come from. Goodness depends on what we choose to do, and who we are becoming. Choice and new growth are the essential elements of change. Choice and new growth are to be a part of our Advent journey.

There are some who are willing, praying for, a transformative, miraculous reign of Christ, the end times, the world perfected, the second coming of the Messiah – the arrival of holy fire. And who am I to judge them – but my advent does not include prayer vigils and spiritual warfare. The advent journey I encourage us to be on, is an Advent waiting, and change seeking, that allows ourselves to be shaped into new creatures. As we ponder the earthly arrival of Jesus and prepare ourselves for his coming again in glory, we understand that our Messiah has been both a nursing child and a righteous judge. He appears as slain lamb and as the Risen Christ.

As for us, it really does not matter whether we see ourselves now as lambs, lions, or vipers. The Realm of Christ that draws near will not be filled with cowardly lions and oblivious oxen, but with peaceable lions and oxen freed from fear. In that realm, we will feed in

abundance, and we will bear for each other the best fruits of repentance.

As we journey in the mix of Advent vigils and early Christmas activities may we be prepared for the way of the one who came in peace and calls for that path of peace to be lived out through each one of us.

So may it be. Amen.