

1/7 Evening Prayer - 11th December 2011

Our readings tonight are unusual - for us. We usually skip the evenings in Advent today is often Christingle service. So we miss the stuff about the Forerunner.

A quick theology lesson -

The prophets predict the coming of the Messiah. They also speak of one coming before him who will prepare his way.

Isaiah 40. 3 tells of

*A voice of one calling in the desert
prepare the way for the Lord*

Malachi 3.1 today

*See I will send my messenger,
who will prepare the way before me.*

This person is identified as Elijah returning. Some see John the Baptist fulfilling that role.

Jesus says that - in a sense -
John the Baptist was an Elijah figure -

At the Transfiguration, we actually see Elijah with Moses speaking with Jesus. Confirmation for the disciples that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ,

But we mustn't get so interested in the Fore-runner that we lose sight of Jesus.

The Forerunner
The Lord is near

3rd of
Advent

Malachi 3.1 - 4; 4. 1 - end
Philippians 4. 4 - 7

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John the Baptist said this -

*there is one coming after me
the thongs of his sandals
I am not worthy to untie.*

John came to point to Jesus.

The prophets, although they spoke of their own times, they also came to point to Jesus.

Even Abraham, Jesus tells us, looked forward to Jesus' day, and was glad.

So we read Malachi - not to learn of the Fore-runner but to learn of Jesus and his day.

Malachi 3 and 4 are full of good verses which speak of "that Day" at the End of the Age when the Lord will come - and his servant prepares the way.

These are things hinted at during Jesus' first coming but to be fulfilled only at Jesus' second coming.

For those looking forward to Jesus' return
for those confident

that Jesus will take them to be with him
these verses are stirring stuff.

He is coming suddenly (Malachi 3. 1) and then 3.2

*Who can endure the day of his coming?
Who can stand when he appears?
For he will be like a refiner's fire
or a launderer's soap.*

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This is not any old fire.
A Refiner's fire is really hot;
it melts gold and silver,
and burns off the dross, the impurities.

This is a day of refining - destruction of the bad
and purifying what is left to be only good.

Depending in how much bad and good there is in you
how much works of the flesh,
and how much Fruit of the Spirit,
by the time the Refiner's fire has been at work
we might be very thin people.
Not much left of us at all, maybe!

And the Launderer's soap (Fuller's soap)
is not any old domestic soap.
This is professional, industrial grade, cleaning stuff
It's got lime in it, and other caustic ingredients.
Launderer's soap gets things really clean
so clean there are holes where the dirt was.
Like the refiner's fire,
when you've been cleaned with Launderer's soap
you are so clean to you are falling apart -
it was the dirt that held you together!

Malachi is trying to find language, metaphor,
that expresses a really deep and complete purge.

Chapter 3 is about Judgement - in preparation
Chapter 4 is about the Day of the Lord
when only what has survived the fire, the soap, will stand.

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Chapter 4 contains some lovely language after the purging of chapter 3.

4. 32

*But for you who revere my name
the sun of righteousness will rise
with healing in its wings.
And you will go out and leap;
like calves from the stall.*

More judgement - those who trampled the innocent will now be trampled by them.

And he speaks of Elijah coming - 4. 6

*He will turn the hearts of the fathers
to their children
and the hearts of the children
to their fathers.*

What we see in our world now is the decay of society the undermining of the family and its values.

Remember families are God's gift -
they teach us about the values of heaven;
what it is to be loved, just because you are;
what it is to belong, and to know a father's love and care.

No wonder God's Enemy wants to undermine families and corrupt the relationships that make up a family - marriage - parenthood - respect - belonging.

We experience these things in a good family
We experience them in a good church.
They teach us of heaven.

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So the preparation for the coming of the King
will be a restoration of families
and a healing of relationships.

If we are working for God's kingdom
to be established now on earth,

if we are working for people to experience now
what God wants for them in eternity,

then we will be working for family values
and for the value of life
especially the life of the unborn child,
the elderly, the weak and the disadvantaged.

I am sure that God is a Liberal.
Sadly the liberals no longer are ...
just as the Socialists are no longer really socialist
and the conservatives are almost indistinguishable!

Family, community, respect -
that's what is missing from our Youth today.
And that is just a symptom of our society.
It is nobody's fault - it is everybody's fault
we have allowed this decay - this slipping of values
to undermine and destroy our society.

This is what Saint Paul is on about
at the end of his letter to the Philippians.

Be gentle - do not be anxious
Rejoice - pray - live in the Peace of Christ.

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and he goes on to one of my favourite passages -
Philippians 4, 8 - 9

*whatever is true, whatever is noble,
whatever is right, whatever is pure
whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable
if anything is excellent or praiseworthy
fill your mind with these things.*

Why is he saying all this? It is in verse 5

And this is why this short passage
is included in today's reading in Advent

The Lord is near.

This talk about the End of the Age
the Day of the Lord, etc, is relevant to today!

The Lord is near - because soon we die.

We need to be growing in the fruit of the Spirit
and living the life of the kingdom now.

The Lord is near - he could be returning soon.

We don't know when - we are told - BE READY!

The Lord is near. Because as his church

we are planting and establishing his kingdom on earth
NOW.

Bringing kingdom values in to peoples lives
NOW!

To prepare the way of the Lord

we are to preach repentance and forgiveness.

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But also to prepare the way of the Lord
we are to live out -

*whatever is true, whatever is noble,
whatever is right, whatever is pure
whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable
whatever is excellent or praiseworthy*

and so to bring God's Kingdom
into the lives of people today.

A few years ago, I was watching Bleak House on TV.
A little lad, a street urchin, died of Chronic Pneumonia.
His life had been a misery.

But as he died - he was surrounded by friends
who made him comfortable and warm
who prayed with him and loved him.

That is like the Kingdom of Heaven.
Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely
here in this world's squalor and sin.

Why? Because the Lord is near.

We are to do this for him.

Find ways to bring - joy, peace, prayer, goodness
into the lives of those around you
into the world where God has placed you.

Elijah will have come. And the Lord will be near.
It is up to us.