

*Sermon preached by Revd Rachel McDougall*

*St Paul's Canterbury*

*Advent 2A*

*Sunday 8 December 2019*

*Preparing for New Life*

Most of the time we do not see the preparation that goes into a performance, the writing of a book, or even the cooking of a good meal, let alone putting any change into place. We usually focus on the results, rather than the work behind it.

Yet today John the Baptist bursts onto the scene with both feet reminding us that preparation is important.

Prepare the way of the Lord says John the Baptist Repent – open your heart and your mind to what is to come.

John the Baptist is a figure who makes us feel uncomfortable, off kilter. He appears at the edges saying uncomfortable things, speaking words of judgement.

It is often hard to tell whether he is a prophet worth hearing or just another crazy crackpot religious fanatic, telling half truths in a judgemental way.

His message makes us feel uncomfortable with his tongue lashing of the religious leaders as you brood of vipers.

Like most truth tellers who make us sit up straight and re-evaluate life we prefer not to be shaken out of our comfort zones.

His message from the edges reminds us of those times when we are disturbed by moments that come at us from left field, where we feel left footed or unprepared suddenly.

It is easy to blame the preacher rather than encounter the truth when we see it.

After all for the religious leaders John is warning them against complacency and relying on their own importance.

The question that stays with me from the readings today is how do we prepare for God's coming?

How do we notice it when God is there?

Are we to see God in these uncomfortable words of judgement?

How do we reconcile it to the sweet babe born in a manger for our healing by a compassionate and loving God?

To prepare is to be open to change and this can be positive.

The word repentance basically means to change direction, to be open to change our hearts and minds.

It is to be open to where God might already meet us in this out of kilter world, even in the midst of seeming chaos, even when we feel out of kilter ourselves.

It is to be open to the ways God meets us at the edges of ourselves where we are caught off guard, where change meets us whether we've asked for it or not?

God keeps looking for us and keeps coming to us. What matters is whether we are open to see it, and to notice it.

Are we prepared to keep growing in faith? Are we prepared to be open to recognize what holds us back from accepting new life and to let that go?

Are we open to realise what distracts us from the deeper things, to be prepared to look beyond our surface preoccupations with tinsel and presents at Christmas to hear the deeper call of God to us?

One way is to make space to be quiet, to be still. It is also being open to the call to put compassion at the heart of how we live with faith.

If we are made happy by things around us and looking for immediate satisfaction how can we open to think clearly about God?

Part of this journey is about finding ourselves and to let go of indifference in whatever form we find it as well as our ability to fill the ache within with things or more information.

To be prepared it to lay down good roots, good foundations for living a life that is loving and good.

Loving God is more than just words, but actions.

To be prepared is to honour the thirst within us for meaning, for love, for God and to see that God knows us, loves us and is very near to us.

To be prepared is to reflect on what is good in our lives and to what sustains us and helps us to live in the middle of crises and to see that God is present and alive somehow in them.

It is also to look within and see what is good within and the desire to live generously and see that God is at work in that.

To search for God is goodness is the beginning of finding God.

Prepare the way of the Lord says John the Baptist.

It is possible to open ourselves more to God and to know God's loving presence within you.

It is possible to bear good fruit in our lives in a way in which the preparation bears fruit.