

Sermon 13 December 2020, Third Sunday of Advent
Reverend Irene

John 1:6-8. 19-28 Advent 3 Year B

John the Baptist had a mission. He was sent by God to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus, knowing he wasn't worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. John's job was simply to be a witness to the coming of God's light through Jesus the Saviour, and direct people towards him. He stood up to the Jews from the council of the Sanhedrin, who sent Levites and Priests from Jerusalem to question him. The Jews themselves were waiting for the Messiah to come, a message that runs through the Old Testament, but at the time of this Gospel, people were still waiting. Then John the Baptist came along, preaching that the time had come, telling people to turn away from the wrong in their lives and be ready to receive him. The Jews must have thought. Who was this guy, and what gave HIM the authority to preach and Baptize?

But John admitted freely that he was not the Messiah, nor was he Elijah, whose return had been prophesied, he was just a man living in the wilderness who answered God's call and knew things were about to change. John's words, strengthened by the prophecy of a cloud of witnesses from the Old Testament, were enthusiastic and exciting, urging people to repent, get ready and be surprised. No one knew Jesus or what he looked like, but John was already scanning the crowd for the face he would recognise. In his work as witness and forerunner to Jesus, John became known as the Baptist or Baptizer as he baptised hundreds of people. And even told the Jews they should be baptised as a sign of their repentance. Baptism was not an unknown ritual to the Jews of his day, as it was one of the rites by which Gentiles were brought into Judaism. However Jews themselves were not baptised, they were God's chosen people, they didn't need baptism. By saying that they did, John was suggesting that Jews were just as much in need of cleansing from their sins as were the Gentiles. No wonder the Jewish authorities sent priests and Levites out to question him. His preaching was obviously effective as crowds came out to listen to him and to be baptised in their hundreds. John didn't care that those who flocked to him, would eventually turn away and follow Jesus, because when that happened, he would have done his job. His mission would be complete!

We too have been baptised, by doing so, we became members of Christ's body, the church. Just like John the Baptist, we are also commissioned by God to go and shine as his light in the world, to talk enthusiastically about Jesus and what it means to see and believe that Christ is at work among and within us.

This has been a difficult year for us all, and we are not out of the woods yet. Apart from the effects of Covid, the world is beset by many problems and we have to be strong and resilient as we search for good news. Good news that goes deeper than material things, the good news of Jesus Christ who has the power to restore and save; that is the good news that we have to share. We need to be like John the Baptist and point people in the direction of Jesus, and leave the Holy Spirit to do the rest.

The more we talk, the more we direct, the more God's kingdom will grow in this place.

Then we too can say our mission is complete!