

Advent reflection Week 3
Week of Third Sunday of Advent - December 13th 2020

Opening prayer

Come Holy Spirit
And open us to the treasures of God's word.
Grant us a readiness to listen
and an openness to learn;
so that we can be alert to your presence
at this time of waiting
and ready to respond to
your call to us.
Amen.

Read through once quietly and slowly.

Gospel – John 1:6-8, 19-28

A man named John was sent from God.

He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.

He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.

And this is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to him to ask him, "Who are you?"

He admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, "I am not the Christ."

So they asked him, "What are you then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No."

So they said to him, "Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?"

He said: "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'make straight the way of the Lord,'" as Isaiah the prophet said."

Some Pharisees were also sent.

They asked him, "Why then do you baptise if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?"

John answered them, "I baptise with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognise,

the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie."

This happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptising.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Sit for a moment as it percolates

Reflection questions:

- What words stand out for you in today's reading?
- What images are strongest for you as you listen to this reading?
- John is asked "who are you"? Who are you in the world today and how does it show itself?
- What gets in the way of you being a witness for Christ?
- One way of being a witness is by picking up our ministry/ vocation in our community. This has been a common theme this Advent. How are you responding to this call?

REFLECTION:

If you have ever stood at the rim of a canyon, you know what it is like to view what happens to the rocks with the incessant flow of water over millennia, the rocky vessels holding a world unto themselves. Peer over the edge and look down into the sky held between the canyon walls and look down to the bottom to the river—the originator of this landscape, still eroding and shaping the earth in its insistent passage towards a distant sea.

In the canyon, we perceive how negative space has its own power; we find that we are just as compelled by the vastness of what is missing, what has been hollowed out, as we are by what remains. There is a potentiality in the chasm, a sense of seeing deep into the heart of things that are usually hidden under the surface.

And perhaps it is in just such a wilderness place that we might imagine John the Baptist, his voice crying out, echoing off of the rockface, mingling with dust and birdsong, proclaiming a coming that will soon carve its own path through the human heart. A coming that will strip us bare of falsehood and pretension. A coming that will carve out an authentic understanding of ourselves.

Like the emptiness of the canyon, though, our authenticity is predicated, first, upon an honest assessment of that which is not there, in order to reveal the deep truth that remains.

"Who are you?" John is asked.

"I am not the Messiah," he says.

Are you Elijah?

"I am not."

The Prophet?

"No"

Relinquishment of these identity markers is John the Baptist's first act of truth-telling. John knows that he must name the roles to which he is not called before he can affirm that to which he is. And in our lives so must we.

How often do we take on the titles offered to us, not because they fit, but because they make us feel more real to ourselves? And how readily we assign roles to others in order to suit our own purposes. But just as the canyon only becomes itself in the void, so, too, with us: In each of our own denials, we get closer to the stark, essential truth of our identity.

“I am,” John admits, “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’” A voice, an invisible resonance piercing the air. Nothing more and nothing less than this. And this is exactly what God needs him to be.

There is much for us to learn from him here, in the watery depths of the canyon, especially in this busy and anxious season. Faced with the multiplying needs of our families, our communities, and our planet, we are frequently tempted to take on far more than what we can actually do or be. And even as many of us attempt to slow down and be more attentive in this liturgical season, the world continues to surround us and shout, “Who are you? “Who are you really?”

But, like John, we are asked to cultivate the space in ourselves for God to accomplish God’s work, and then perhaps we will find the one voice that was ours to claim all along and realise who we really are.

For John, the purpose of his own voice is clear: the announcement of God’s promise of salvation. And so he baptises in the river, inviting others to let themselves be transformed by God’s power—to let their layers of defensiveness be stripped away, to hollow out a space in their hearts in preparation for “the one who is coming after,” the Christ, the one who is making all things new.

And here, in another time and in another wilderness, John’s invitation remains open to us, and it is as urgent as ever because we are still learning who we are and who we are not. Like the canyon, we are still being shaped, still being laid bare to the wind and the light, still becoming as deep and open and vast as God imagines we can become. And, like John, it is only in the cultivation of our own holy emptiness that we will, at last, be the vessels of God’s inbreaking purpose.

(Reflection written by Ann Smith, St Martin’s parish Tranent)

Intercessory prayers:

- We pray for all keyworkers in our community, and give thanks for all they’ve done for others over the last year.
Lord hear us
- We pray for all who are feeling lonely and cut off from loved ones or a sense of community that they might feel comfort in you.
Lord hear us
- We ask for you to be with us as we strive to recognise and take up our vocation in the world today.
Lord hear us

Add in any other prayers you would like to include and then end with:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning
is now and ever shall be
World without end
Amen

