

St Peter's, Ealing  
Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2017  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent

### What sort of people ought you be?

---

Through Advent, marking its passage and focusing our reflections, we light candles. Sunday by Sunday a new candle is lit, as each candle is lit we pray. Our prayer is offered to mark the significance of our actions. In this simple act of lighting the Advent candles each week we reflect on the forerunners of our faith whose words and actions direct us towards the coming of the Kingdom of God.

For the first Sunday of Advent our prayer pointed to the patriarchs, to the witness of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob whose response to the word of God created the foundation for the coming of God's kingdom on earth. The patriarchs answered the call of God to move and establish God's people in the founding of the Hebrew nation, the establishment of Jerusalem and preparing the way for the foundation of the people of Israel. Abraham moved from the Euphrates to Canaan (Genesis 12.1-9). Isaac, Abraham's son, continued the establishment of the nation through his son Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, eventually following Joseph to Egypt with his other sons from where, through Moses, God calls the people of Israel to freedom in the Promised Land, land promised through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This became the great Exodus through which the people of Israel understand salvation and their relationship with God. Through this new understanding of nationhood, a once nomadic people establishes themselves through God as a rooted nation eventually choosing to be led by kings in Saul, David and Solomon. Through them the path is set for the coming of the Messiah, the anointed one, the son of David, chosen by God to proclaim the good news of the salvation of the world.

The work of the prophets we mark with the lighting of today's second candle. The prophets ministry was to hold up to the people of Israel to account; encouraging them when they were faithful; criticising them when they turned away from God; teaching the people the way of God, the place of the Law and their responsibility to God and the people through the Law. Contrary to

popular interpretation, the prophets were not fortune tellers but social critics who interpreted the events of the day through their relationship with and understanding of God as revealed in the nations story, scriptures and Torah. Their task was to prepare the way of God amongst God's people, to tell the people what their relationship with God should be and to encourage them to be faithful and just. When their relationship with God was broken the prophets encouraged the people to repair it, to return to the Lord who would richly pardon. The prophets were those who reminded the people of Israel of their duty to live by the word of the Lord, to set the captive free, to care for the widow and the orphan, to deal with their neighbour justly and in a way worthy of the people of God.

The prophets called out to the people as they turned away from God, as they followed their own path, as they followed other gods. When this happened, the prophets were those who highlighted the effect this turning from God had on society. The consequences of such an action could be great. As the people moved away from God, from its moral compass inferring more importance on its right to choose for itself and allowing that choice to be for the self; as they failed to listen to God so their actions or inaction affected those around them. Those that had no power or wealth suffered, inequality and injustice grew, the way of the Lord was lost and the prophets cried out.

The place of the prophet is to hold that truth before the people. The prophet shows the people what they are like, what they should be, and how they should behave. In his second letter Peter poses an important question to us – “what sort of people ought *you* be?” (2 Peter 3.11). He is asking of the faithful reader what should they be like. That means what should your faith be like, what should be the character of your faith. As Christians what sort of people should you be?

The way of Jesus in Mark's gospel is pronounced by a prophet. John the Baptist's ministry has been one of telling the people of Jerusalem to repent and believe for the time is at hand. He it is who holds up the tax collectors and soldiers, the Pharisees and the Judges to judgement and encourages them to change their ways, to be baptised and renewed in the power and spirit of God; to promise to follow the way of God that is the way of truth and love and justice. To be renewed in the power of God, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.

A question arises, through our baptism isn't this the sort of people we should be? Isn't this what Jesus encourages us to do, to be prophets, to point out the way of God and to encourage others to follow?

I wonder how you came to faith? I was baptised as a baby and was dragged to church through my youth. It wasn't until someone pointed me in the right direction and encouraged me along the way faith, some one who was my prophet if you like, that I began to believe. Each of us will have people who directed us along the way of faith, who pointed us along the way of salvation and encouraged us along the path of truth to meet Jesus and make him our Lord and Saviour. Are you that person for someone else? Are you that prophet calling others to follow the way of faith, is that the sort of person you ought to be?

The booklet, 'God with Us' you will have received in your Advent in a Bag parcel reflects this week on watching. To be prophets we need to listen to God, to hear his word for us and to watch and recognise God's presence. God speaks to us constantly the question is are we listening, are we watching for God, noticing his presence and seeing God in others. To watch requires us to stop. To understand requires us to pray.

Christmas will soon be here. A time of the year we can easily talk about the faith we believe in. When the opportunity arises do not shy away but profess Jesus Christ is Lord, born in a manger crucified on a cross and risen from the dead that we may all know the love of God and the way of truth. Watch for God in the world and seek his wisdom and guidance through prayer.