



***Second Sunday Advent***

***Isaiah 11: 1-10 Romans 15: 4-9 Matthew 3: 1-12***

Emmanu-el! God is with us. This word is like a cry of wonderment. The transcendent One is also the One who abides with us. This mystery evokes in us a sense of that awe we experience when a child is born, or when someone tells us that they love us.

Today we are given a wonderful poem from the writings of the prophet Isaiah. The church uses this poem to describe the difference Jesus has made to the world.

Today let us reflect on the difference we might be making to the world. This is our ministry, the divine invitation, to take up the work of Jesus and continue it in our corner of the world.

The first image is the stump. We have all seen tree stumps, in varying stages of decay, in paddocks, beside streams, on barren hillsides. Sometimes when we stop to look we see a shoot; new life emerging from the old, the abandoned.

Is it possible, that we as disciples see ourselves as stumps? We've done our bit. Someone else can take over. This dead wood can't become green again. It may be that we need to move on, to find another more life-giving way of being and doing. Be aware of what is happening around you. Listen to the stirrings within. It is possible, that as Jesus said to his disciples, that you have to "shake the dust from your feet" and move on.

Does this mean abandoning discipleship? It means be more creative.

The other image from Isaiah is a kind of dream, a fantasy landscape. The animals of forest and plain come together in peace and companionship. Wolf and lamb, lion and kid with the weak offering hospitality to the strong, we can reflect on this when our timid selves feel that we can do nothing.

The cow and the bear shall be neighbours. The use of animals as metaphors, invites us to think about our relationships. Are there areas where personality differences are causing division? Is there a need for some healing?

We are told that the calf and the lion cub will browse together. This image points to a most important area of reconciliation. Many children inherit the quarrels and prejudices of their parents. This is a time to resolve that our legacy to our children, to the next generation, will be positive, not because issues are swept under the carpet, but because they have been faced and processes for healing have begun.

The child in the image guides the animals. Jesus tells us that simplicity and honesty are requirements for membership of the kingdom. The way forward is not through power but maybe playfulness or a creativity that allows all to participate as equals. "I was at God's side, an artist, delighting God day after day, ever at play at God's side" This passage from the Book of Proverbs reminds us that Christmas is a call to our inner child to recapture the spontaneity, trust and truthfulness that are the gift of the child.

At first glance the picture of John the Baptist in Matthew seems at odds with the image from Isaiah. John is a reminder that change doesn't come about by wishful thinking. It requires passion, commitment, and faithfulness. The wake up call of last week's reading is translated into action. Renewal, conversion of heart, requires more than calling ourselves people of God. "Where is the evidence?" says John.

Paul gives us both encouragement and a prayer for the journey. The scriptures were written so that we would learn hope, and patience. He, too, calls for harmony with one another built on harmony within ourselves. Then our common prayer will be an expression of a real unity of purpose according to the spirit of Christ Jesus.

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