



## **Br Adrian for Advent 3 (2020)**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Repentance is one of the first words that comes to my mind when thinking of John the Baptist, a simple man bringing a simple, timeless message that needs no new takes on, wearing camels hair eating locusts, like a prophet of old. A stark message as it is often portrayed, repent! It's a word that conjures up fist bashing, bible waving and fire and brimstone. However, although it maybe how one thinks of John the Baptist the word repentance doesn't appear in any of the readings today.

The Gospel speaks of making way for the Lord, the other two readings are full of gladness and joy and this is what I want to focus on today because that is what repentance brings, peace, joy and gladness. It is not primarily a big stick to hit you over the head with, although that element does exist but it is a turning, a turning away from judgement, away from the individualism and possessiveness, away from the violence whether passive or actual and the them and us tribalism that has plagued human existence since Cain and Abel (including within these walls) and towards, respect for each other, compassion, one humanity tied and bound up in the love of God and dependent on each other and on the natural world around us.

The concept of repentance is not a narrow, scary concept that reduces our horizons to musts and do not's, but is a concept of freeing us from the inward restrictions we put on ourselves. These tend to inhibit and mask who we are. Instead of this repentance helps us to connect with God, to allow him to heal our wounds and so to broaden our horizons of that which we thought was impossible. Repentance helps us out of our regrets and endless cycles of pain and retribution as we come to realise God loves us and we see God active in each other's lives.

It was a father in the ancient church, I forget which one, who compared the eternal torment to the love we knew was there and we felt ourselves and yet resisted and rejected it and then later we find out it was real but there is nothing we can do now other than observe from a distance.

I don't know about you but I have experienced the foretaste of such pain before coming into community, rejecting the love of another, who I loved, out of fear, and then the long years of still being around them observing from afar just out of pure stubbornness. No worse a pain have I ever experienced, it messed me and probably the other up for some time, and indeed there was much weeping and gnashing of teeth. Although that is a very earthly example, it is what repentance frees us from so we can enter the joy of forgiveness, of renewed friendship or at least of moving on in better mind to not repeat and hurt others in the same way again.

So having said repentance is positive I give a very painful example but repentance was indeed the positive step that began to transform sorrow into new life. As John the Baptist is the forerunner to Jesus so for us repentance is the forerunner to experiencing the beautiful grace of God, already waiting for us, and indeed already happening and offered, but whilst we're full of regret, sadness and anger we are unable to see or touch it clearly. We need to reclaim repentance in the same way we need to reclaim it's own forerunner humility these do not need to be on the terms to be avoided list for their negativity.

We do need to accept all that we are, the good and the parts that niggle, the parts that cause pain to others and ourselves, unless we acknowledge the reality of our own being and listen to it we become blind and deaf to the needs of those around us and unable to show mercy instead of judgment and blind and deaf to what good we can be and in that there is no repentance and so our ability to accept and live in God's grace is diminished.

But we are all forgiven by God because we believe aren't we? It is indeed so but that does not negate our responsibility to persevere in continually acknowledging ourselves and turning away from the bad in us and towards God's mercy in prayer, and the good we are, being put into effect for others. For if we truly love and believe in God we will not cease in chasing after him and trying to do better, we will see and feel the pain we cause to our neighbour, to God's creation and will want to act to correct it because of God's love for us and our growing love for him. We cannot live abstractly as individuals in things that concern me and things that don't once God has started to grow in our hearts, we all become caught up in the love of God, everything matters.

Again that begins to sound rather painful, it is, but those are growing pains and pains of progress rather than the deadly pain of stubbornness. They are the pains of growing love, and where there is love there is God, and so there is much consolation to aid us along the way and many beams of hope and renewal, with our care for each other, even if but fleeting, that begin to lighten our path and our burdens that we now share rather than bare alone, as bad turns to good and good gets stronger still.

John was the forerunner making straight the way for the Lord, he offered a baptism of repentance, a sign but as he said he was not the Messiah, the Lord himself, the Lord we continue to wait for, from whom there is plenteous redemption and truly the forgiveness of sins. His grace and mercy endure forever. He comes in swaddling bands, lying in a manger, He becomes a refugee without a home or somewhere to rest his head, what humility, what love, do not reject it or repentance for being negative, embrace it for it is the way to peace.

We have now reached the point in which today's passages make sense, Isaiah speaks of vengeance for the Lord, in the light of repentance and forgiveness, this is not violence, this is the conquering of ills and wrong by the love that is the Grace of God.

A love that replaces the sackcloth and ashes of mourning and regret with the garland of mercy and grace and replaces the acrid smell of the Myrrh of death with the oil of the joy that comes from knowing we are loved and cared for. That our good, will be made stronger and the bad that has destroyed us will be rebuilt stronger yet and transformed into good because of our repentance and by God's grace. How can we not then rejoice in our Lord and our whole being exalt in our God? How indeed after noticing such progress can we not pray unceasingly and give thanks in all circumstances as St Paul writes to the people of Thessalonica? The grace of God can do all things, in that we hope, in that we trust, and because of that repentance is indeed a suitable response and a beautiful offering to our Lord.

May the God of peace himself sanctify us entirely; and may our spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who calls us is indeed very faithful, and he will accomplish it. Persevere, keep faith, and long in hope for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, trust in him and all that has been promised will come to pass. Amen.