

SERMON : SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT 2020 (Peace and Humility!)

MAY the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. <Amen>

I'm going to begin by telling you a story about your Bishop! Steven was in our parish for a meeting one day last week and, before he left Dunedin to travel to the Wakatipu, he phoned ME to ask for MY permission to park at St Peter's. +Steven does this every single time he enters God's parish here.

The reason I tell you this is simple. The beginning of the gospel of Mark that you have just heard and my little story about +Steven serve to remind me that the second Sunday in Advent is . . . "A Lesson In Humility" <PAUSE>

So, John the Baptist appears in the wilderness and before you know he has become a MAJOR celebrity. Scripture tells us "The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him".

They didn't just listen - they responded; they confessed their sins and were baptised!

Not only was John hugely popular, he was also hugely successful.

For all his popularity and success, though, John was strikingly different from the average person. Many people respond to great popularity, success, authority, high position with arrogance, self-inflated ego, pride and swagger. But from the beginning, "The Baptist" was different.

"It's not about me" was the root of "The Baptist's" message. John preached about someone else, someone who would come after him whose sandal thongs John did not consider himself even worthy to tie.

John wasn't interested in the limelight. John wasn't interested in power and holding on to it. John wasn't interested in the praise or admiration of others.

John WAS interested in preparing the way for someone else, and he didn't let personal ambition get in the way of doing his job well. <PAUSE>

John was a baptiser; his task was preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Baptism was not an invention of John, nor was it unique to the Israelites. From ancient times, baptism was a well-known symbol, an outward sign, of a new spiritual birth, of entering into a new form of life.

For those whom John baptised, it marked their confession that they were sinners. Yup, we've stuffed up! Yup, we've got it wrong!. When we admit that, we are laying aside our human pride and confessing the truth of what we really are ... human ... and frail.

But we are not making that confession blindly. We are making it in the light of the revealed knowledge that God loves us immeasurably, and that he has made atonement for us in Jesus Christ.

In other words, because God has revealed to us that he is for us, we are FREE in Christ both to fearlessly acknowledge our frailty before God, and free to accept God's gift of atonement and his new creation of us in Jesus Christ.

Because we have met with the grace of God in Jesus Christ, we can entrust ourselves to him fully and without reservation. Safe in his love, we can give over to him even the crushing burdens of our darkest mistakes and fears.

In the coming Christ-child, we are a new creation (see 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15). We are set free (Galatians 5:1)! God has freed us to be the new, redeemed, healed and complete persons he has made us to be in Christ.

We can use this coming gift to hear and obey our heavenly Father, or we can reject it and continue to live as though God had not made us his covenant partner, as though he had not made us the beloved recipients of his overflowing grace in Christ (verse 13).

We are saved by God's grace, God's love, God's utter faithfulness to his redeeming purpose for this humanity. God loves us so much that in the coming Christ-child he took humanity itself into himself.

That is the way God chose to make us into a new creation. The Son of God, the Christ-child took humanity into himself, and in doing that he reconciled us to God.

This is the God who in immeasurable love humbled himself to take all our burdens upon himself, including our ugliest mistakes, and turn us into a new and beautiful creation in His Son.

"The Baptiser" recognised this.

John's ministry was a ministry of humility, "It's not about me folks. It's about the one who comes after me. I need to slip away from this limelight, this popularity so you can see, and follow, the true and living greatness of another. <PAUSE>

I pray to God that people who find themselves in positions of power, authority, celebrity, or whatever can drop all those airs of superiority and pride, and humble themselves before the mighty hand of God, because it's really not about them at all.

I thank God for our Bishop and his on-going lessons of humility for it shows us that ...

GOD is truly our all and in all.

I runga e te Ingoa o te Atua, te Matua, te Tama me te Wairua Tapu.
In the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit <AMINE>