



Seek ye first the Kingdom of God



3rd Sunday of Advent ~ 16th December 2018

God for whom we watch and wait,
you sent John the Baptist to prepare
the way of your Son:
give us courage to speak the truth,
to hunger for justice,
and to suffer for the cause of right,
with Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Zephaniah 3:14-20 OT page 891
Philippians 4:4-7 NT page 196
Luke 3:7-18 NT page 57
(NIV used in sermon preparation).

Today is Gaudete ~ rejoicing Sunday and our Advent Candle is rose or pink to express that. Are you ready to Gaudete ~ to Rejoice?

Let's take a few minutes to explore.

Each week of Advent as we gather we are singing O come, O come Immanuel as a prayer . Preparation to the worship we are offering and, as we worship the rest of our music each week has been chosen to enhance what God's Word is telling us and the focus that we are making on His preparation for our receiving His son Jesus Christ our Lord as Saviour.

This week we focus on the ministry God gave to St. John the Baptist. John the Baptist ~ the prophet of the New Testament because, of course, in Christianity Jesus is far, far more! John's important role was in telling the people to 'Prepare the Way of the Lord' and to be ready to hear, find and receive a new way into the relationship with God the Father.

Are you excited by the Love that the Father shows for each one of us in this extraordinary and caring preparation ~ I am and you should be!

We have already sung 'Sing to God new songs of worship' so have you begun to think what your new song to God is?

Even if you have been Christian for many years, the Holy Spirit is always ready to reveal to you new ways of understanding the Father's Love and your salvation.

When I finish sharing with you, we will sing and reflect. The first song is 'Restore, O Lord' where we prayerfully ask God to do what He is already doing ~ to re-establish the honour of His name. We ask that we will see His hand in all things in such ways that we simply can't ignore them! To do that we have to be bent and moulded to make a fresh response to God's presence ~ not just once but daily so that, over time we are transformed! That means, by implication that each one of us will be changed. When was the last time you noticed that you had changed and saw God at work? Advent is about expectancy ~ expecting God to work and as we wait and when we see the changes, however small or challenging, we should be giving thanks, so we will then stand and sing ~ 'Rejoice in the Lord always'.

When we have recognised God in each other at the Peace and we prepare to make our thanksgiving offering we will sing 'God is working His purpose out'. Again, as you give thanks, think about why.

The why is because God has a purpose for your life and mine and that is really exciting. God's purpose may take us to places we do not expect and we may be really challenged to get there; or equally His purpose may be so subtle that only we know in our hearts that the changes have happened!

During Communion we have time to consolidate what God is showing us today as the songs encourage us to be ever thankful in the Lord and to stop in our tracks and once again seek to experience God's Kingdom.

As we conclude we prepare to leave with a new and exciting challenge in our hearts as we sing 'I want to serve the purpose of God' here and now, in the week ahead and throughout our lifetime ~ in our generation and to delight in what God asks of us.

We may not see God's physical return in our lifetime ~ after all His time is not ours and the world has waited 2018 years so far! However, the Lord can come again into your life and in to mine ~ NOW ~ because we invite Him and when we have invited Him in we continually expect to see Him at work.

That is all in today's scriptures ~ Zephaniah tells us despite our past, our suffering and circumstances we should sing, shout, be glad and rejoice. Philippians exhorts us to rejoice in the Lord always without being anxious because the Lord is near! That is the mindset that St. John the Baptist declared that his listeners and that you and I should find in faith ~ discarding our deceived ways (being broods of vipers) and evidencing that anyone is capable of change.

Let's remind ourselves why. ~ Because the birth of the incarnate Lord transforms our relationship with God, through His coming, His ministry, His death and His resurrection.

Now if that isn't Good News that you are expecting then ask yourself what it is that you think being a Christian is about?

Just for starters ~ It is about being accepted by God for who we are and trustingly expecting that God knows how He can bend and mould us towards the wholeness He has for each of us. The choice to walk with Jesus is ours ~ what is your choice?

Where are you in the joy of Gaudete?

If your choice is indeed to expect God to work in your life then knowing God's all embracing Love will support you, and you can make today's Collect your prayer this week.

Let us pray ~

God for whom we watch and wait,
you sent John the Baptist to prepare
the way of your Son:
give us courage to speak the truth,
to hunger for justice,
and to suffer for the cause of right,
with Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**