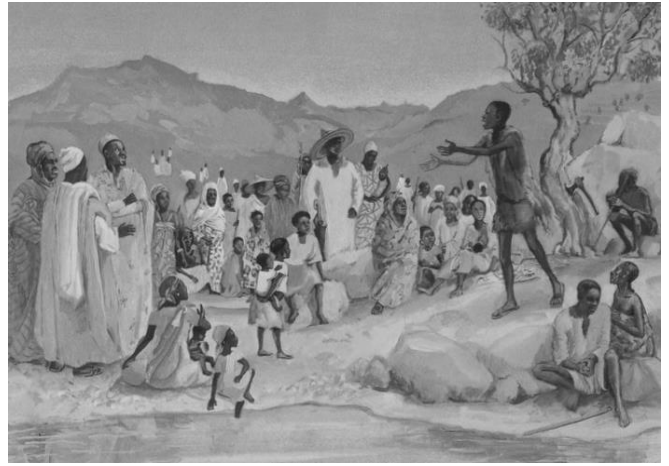


The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. See I am sending a Messenger ahead of you. Who will prepare your way. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight!

Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low and the crooked shall be made straight!



December 6th Advent 2 reflection : Isaiah 40: 1-11 Psalm 85 2 Peter 3: 8-15 Mark 1: 1-8

GOOD NEWS!

Many of us have been holding on to the Good News that a vaccination programme is in the offing. Is this the beginning of a new era for all of us? An era perhaps without fear of death, or redundancy. An era of more knowns and less unknowns?

Other eras of hope from British history include the announcement and implementation of the Slavery Abolition Act, 1833, freeing more than 800,000 enslaved Africans in the Caribbean and South Africa as well as a small number in Canada. Or in recent history the race relations acts of 1965 and 1976 which brought equal rights. Or the equal pay act of 1970 so men and women's pay by law would be equal. Or the post war beginnings of the NHS, access to health for all ...

New era's don't just happen. All have preparation. Before the abolition of slavery amongst others William Wilberforce spoke out, and Olaudah Equiano shared his own story of life as a slave. Before the race relations act many spoke out against their exclusion from work, rental accommodation, and mortgages. Before the pay equalities act, there were the 1968 strikes in the Ford Factory in Dagenham. The creation of the NHS in 1948 was the product of years of hard work and a motivation from various figures who felt the current healthcare system was insufficient and needed to be revolutionised. So many different people who had the imagination and courage to act and think differently; prophets in their time speaking and acting for justice.

In marketing , these new eras in life and business are called tipping points- the little things that eventually lead to a big difference.

This Sunday's readings focus on Good News. In the prophet Isaiah, the Good News is that God comes to rescue his people from exile. God's love seeks those in barren places- all humanity who are like grass, whose beauty fades, who are frail, God will come like a King on a highway plain, like a lover to their beloved.

And now, says the book of Mark, the world has reached the tipping point of a new era. The prophet John the Baptist brings the Good News to Galilee that God will enter human history in an unprecedented way. John tells people to get ready, repent , prepare the way for the Lord to come. He offers a baptism of repentance as a means of "getting ready." God will send Jesus who will change everything- a new era is dawning.

God is coming to us! This is fantastic news. God's arrival is certain and therefore calls for our response. So, what can we do to get ready?

What are the little things in your life that need to be turned around that would eventually lead to a big difference? What can you do with your little voice that could add to the other little voices to prepare for big change? What are the little things you are hiding that could be brought into the light one at a time that could lead to a life turned around...

All turning around is repentance- a recognition that in God's love our sin can be forgiven and grace can abound.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight! God will come and fulfil all of God's promises whether or not we do any of these things — but knowing God is on the way, why wouldn't we want to do them?

Revd Becky



HYMN REFLECTION by Malcolm Sturgess

There are so many beautiful Advent hymns that I could write these reflections for five years and not repeat myself (I hope I don't have to). Or one could make an Advent Calendar of hymns. This year we are considering two of the more eclectic ones and two of the more "straight-from-the-heart" ones. Whichever your preference, please try to enjoy and gain something from all four of them. We did eclectic and complicated last week, so this week we turn again to Graham Kendrick who speaks directly to the heart, and facilitates our praise in return.

It would be interesting to know which season Graham had in mind when he wrote *Make way, make way for Christ the King in splendour arrives*. NHWS (our brown book) recommends it for every week in Advent, but many contributors to the Internet suggest it should be used for Palm Sunday.

In neither case does Jesus arrive in the physical state we would describe as splendour. [PS I contacted Graham himself, a fellow-member of HSGBI, to ask him which season he wrote it for. Neither. It was written specifically for one of the first PRAISE MARCHES. He is happy for it to be used at either season]. It is interesting how

many times the words of this hymn correspond to the ancient words we shall look at next week.

In typical Kendrick fashion there is an orchestral twiddly bit in the middle of the chorus. It fits in fairly naturally; some people are moved to sing it, repeating the previous phrase. That's alright; it's called spontaneity, which is no bad thing in worship. It wouldn't do in Kings College, Cambridge, but never mind.

Make way, make way, for Christ the King in splendour arrives;
Fling wide the gates and welcome him into your lives.

REFRAIN Make way, make way for the King of Kings;
Make way, make way, and let his kingdom in!

He comes the broken hearts to heal, the pris'ners to free;
The deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance, the blind shall see.

REFRAIN

And those who mourn with heavy hearts, who weep and sigh,
With laughter, joy and royal crown he'll beautify.

REFRAIN

We call you now to worship him as Lord of all,
To have no gods before him, their thrones must fall!

REFRAIN

Images:

John the Baptiser, at the edge of the Village, Cameroon

John the Baptiser as a mosaic

Ain't no mountain image ... A reminder of the love letter of Isaiah that God will come to us whatever is in the way- a bit like the Aretha Franklin song.. *Ain't no mountain high enough, Ain't no valley low enough to keep me away from you!* Becky

God of hope,
you call us from the exile of our
sin with the good news of
restoration;
you build a highway through the
wilderness;
you come to us and bring us
home.
Comfort us with the expectation
of your saving power,
made known to us in Jesus
Christ our Lord. Amen.

