

## Gaudete Sunday 2022

*St Mary the Virgin, St Briavels, and St Mary Magdelene,  
Hewelsfield.*

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

For the second week running we find ourselves hearing the story of John the Baptist. Those of you who here last week will remember that we heard the story of John ministering in the wilderness. We heard the account of what he wore - the camels hair, the leather belt - , what he ate - locusts and wild honey -. We heard what he did: baptising, with a baptism of repentance. And we heard what he said: the kingdom of heaven is drawing near.

We meet him again this Sunday. We are eight chapters on in St Matthew's gospel. Last Sunday we heard from chapter 3, and the reading that we have just heard comes from chapter 11. Time has moved on. Quite how much time the Scriptures don't tell us. Not precisely. Months certainly. Possibly years. But we know some things have happened since last we met John. The first is that John the Baptist has been arrested and imprisoned. We have to look to the other gospels to find out more information about that. And we learn that John has been arrested for speaking truth to power. He has been criticising King Herod for some dodgy dealings in marriage ethics. The other thing that we know has happened is that Jesus has begun his public ministry. Jesus is moving around Galilee, calling his disciples, ministering, healing, preaching, and working wonders.

And sitting in prison, John is clearly getting reports of everything Jesus is doing. And he sends his own disciples to Jesus, because he wants to know the answer to the key question:

Is now the time? Is this the time? Is this Jesus of Nazareth the one towards whom John has been pointing during his own ministry? Is it happening? Is the kingdom arriving? Or is Jesus another forerunner? That key question that the disciples of John the Baptist put to Jesus: 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?'

Is it now?

Now of course we have the benefit of knowing how the story ends. We know that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, that he is the one whom the prophets and the Old Testament point towards, the one towards whom John the Baptist has already pointed saying, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.' And it's quite hard therefore to put ourselves into the mindset of people living before the resurrection of Christ.

But actually, there is a deep truth here in this gospel reading, which is that even though we know the tomb was empty, even though we know that Christ is risen, yet we find, again and again, that it's hard to believe. That we doubt. That we are not convinced that the Kingdom is coming. The same John the Baptist who could point to Jesus walking along and say, 'Look, there is the Lamb of God', which sounds pretty confident and nailed down, can say here in today's reading, 'actually, are you the one?' 'Should we be still waiting?' Uncertainty, wobbles in faith, genuine anxiety that perhaps this is not actually going to happen. We know all those don't we?

And so, just in the nick of time, Mother Church gives us the gift of the Third Sunday of Advent. This Sunday which you might remember I preached about this time last year, being a moment of optimism and joy right in the middle of Advent. Its traditional

name is Gaudete Sunday, which you might know from the Christmas Carol that you will have heard on the radio or CD probably already this season, means 'Rejoice!' And that's why we light the rose coloured, or the pink, candle today. Because the lighter colour, the brighter, more optimistic, cheery colour of the sunrise is here to remind us that we are half way there. And actually today is *exactly* half way through Advent! Two weeks down, and in two weeks time [we will be gathered here on/it will be] Christmas Day. So right in the heart of this season of preparation we get a glimpse of the sunrise, a pink candle glimmering next to the purple ones. The dawn is coming. We get a shot in the arm of joy. The third candle of Advent is the candle of joy.

Just two other things to note this morning really from our readings. The first is that when he's asked whether he is the one for whom John has been waiting, Jesus replies that the proof is in the evidence of the Kingdom coming. Jesus says, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor hear good news.'

In other words, as the Kingdom moves, as the Kingdom creeps slowly closer, we can't help but see the evidence. In just the same way that the light of the Advent candles gets a little bit brighter every week as one more flame starts to twinkle, so God's glory, God's grace, starts to leak out around the edges. A bit like an overfull tub of soup with a lid that doesn't fit properly, it starts to trickle out.

And how does it trickle out? Well, in you. In me. Maybe not in those extraordinary ways that Jesus was able to manifest. I don't know about you, but I don't raise that many people from the

dead. And I don't heal that many lame people. If I could do that I would probably start with myself!

But no less valuable to God are the things you *can* do. The acts of kindness. The acts of charity. The moments of prayer. The decision to care. To ask someone how they are. To take the time to be present. To bring before God the broken places of the world. To do something practical to help. All of these are parts of what the tradition refers to as a 'rule of life', a way of living out our faith.

And then the second thing: and that is that possibly the most important thing for us to have in our life is *patience*. I don't know whether you noticed, but the word 'patience' appears four times in those four short verses we heard from the letter of James. When words appear repeatedly in the Scripture we need to take particular note. St James tells his readers to be patient. And that of course is because the Kingdom is born slowly.

There's a lovely poem from the Iona community which I sometimes use at midnight mass - I might use it this year when I see you next - which begins, 'When the world was dark and the city was quiet, you came. You crept in beside us.'

The Kingdom is creeping in. Just like a baby in the darkness of a stable, [in a manger so far from home', as the singing group will tell us later], so the Kingdom creeps in, in little acts of kindness, of witness, of grace. Like candles in the darkness. So slowly, sometimes it feels, but growing. And so we must be patient. Just as the farmer must wait for the rain before the green shoots appear, so we watch, and pray, and hope, and hold the space where joy can emerge.  
Amen.