

Proclaiming the coming of Jesus.

So, In that short but very significant passage from Mark we hear how John begins to fulfil Scripture by proclaiming the coming of Jesus (that familiar passage in Isaiah 40 of preparing the way of the Lord).

But, as you listened to that reading what was your impression of John? How do you see him? An Evangelist! Or an Eccentric! Why would God choose someone like him to tell the world of the coming of Jesus?

Imagine if the appointment for the “bringer of Good News” was by the modern method of interview!

“Well sir we have 3 candidates, with 2 very clear choices. They both have theological degrees, are fully trained in the Hebraic tradition, and are recommended by the Chief Rabbi.

“ OK. You said there were 3?

“ Yes sir, but the third is a bit strange. He lives in the desert, dresses in a camel hair tunic and eats locusts and wild honey. He won't leave his cave but expects the people to come out to him to hear what he has to say. Won't come in for an interview of course.”

“Hmmm!”

Well of course God had already chosen John, and He got it right against all human logic. The people streamed out of their towns and villages to hear what John had to say. A message proclaiming the coming of Jesus, and the message of repentance. Saying sorry (truly saying sorry) for your sins and being washed clean of them all, symbolised in Baptism.

Wow! The message they had been receiving from their religious leaders up until now was one of more sin and more burdens being heaped upon their shoulders, with a difficult (almost impossible) and often expensive way to being forgiven by God.

Yet, here was this rather wild looking man speaking so powerfully not only about the way forward to be clean in the eyes of God, but one still to come who could just be, just be the long awaited Messiah. This was exciting, something to be grasped, something to look towards, a new future. So as the news of John and his message spread, so more and more people came out to listen.

God indeed got it right.

John preached repentance. A dictionary describes the word as feeling regret and being sorry for something done or said. The early Christian Church seem to have changed it to penance – having to do something difficult or unpleasant to atone for your sin. Well I don't think John meant the latter. He wanted them to wipe away the past so that people could look to the future – change the way they were – the way they behaved.

Having looked at what John was saying it begs the question 'Where does our focus lie?' Is it on the things of this world- Money, power, possessions? Or do we think of ourselves as seekers of the Father's Kingdom and his righteousness? Not such a clear cut choice as it seems, and I think they are challenging questions for all of us in today's society. However, the reality is, only you can answer for yourself.

Wherever you stand on this please do not push aside. It mustn't be ignored. To keep our "kingdom" focus requires constant attention and effort.

We say a confession every Sunday in church. As John asks of us "is it a truly sorry confession" or are we sometimes just saying the words? We hear, we read we sing (when allowed) about God's Kingdom life, but only you (no-one else) has the power to live the Kingdom life to the best of your ability. An ability to be a light shining in the darkness.

Amen